

Summer 2018

Chess Horizons



FREE ENTRY FOR GMs & IMs

78th New England Open

September 1 – 3, 2018



Location: Crowne Plaza Boston - Newton
320 Washington St.
Newton, MA 02458

3-day and 2-day options available!

20 USCF
Grand Prix
Points

Prizes: \$4,000 b/120 paid entries, 75% guaranteed

Championship	\$650 – 300 – 250, top U2400 \$225, top U2200 \$225
U2000	\$400 – 200 – 150
U1800	\$400 – 200 – 150
U1600	\$300 – 150 – 100, top U1400 \$150, top U1200 \$150

Time Control: 40/100, SD/30 d10 (2-day rounds 1-3 are G/45 d5)

Sections:

Championship Section (rated 1800+) – 3-day only – **FIDE Rated**

U2000 Section – 3-day or 2-day

U1800 Section – 3-day or 2-day

U1600 Section – 3-day or 2-day

Round Times:

3-day section – Saturday 11:00 AM & 5:30 PM, Sunday 11:00 AM & 5:30 PM, Monday 10:30 AM & 3:45 PM

2-day section – Sunday 11:00 AM, 1:00 PM, 3:00 PM, & 5:30 PM; Monday 10:30 AM & 3:45 PM

Byes: Limit 2 byes, rounds 1-5 in Championship Section, rounds 1-6 in U2000 to U1600 sections. Players must commit to byes in rounds 4-6 before round 2. Byes in rounds 4-6 are irrevocable.

Entry Fee:

3-day section - \$75 online by 11:59 PM on 8/30, \$85 onsite

2-day section - \$74 online by 11:59 PM on 8/30, \$85 onsite

Onsite Registration: 3-day – Saturday 9/1 from 8:30 to 9:30 AM; 2-day – Sunday 9/2 from 8:30 to 9:30 AM

Other Information:

- There is no 2-day schedule for the Championship Section.
- The Championship Section is FIDE rated and uses FIDE rules.
- Free entry to GMs and IMs.
- New England champion title to highest-scoring New England resident or student in each section.
- Unrated prize limits: \$200 in U2000, \$150 in U1800, \$100 in U1600, cannot win title except in the Championship Section.
- Official September USCF ratings will be used. Unofficial ratings are usually used if otherwise unrated.
- Please bring board, set, and clock. No equipment will be provided.

Register online at www.senecachess.org. For more info, contact Frank Vogel, frankvogel3@verizon.net, phone (401) 837-1302.



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Chess Horizons

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*Cover photo: 87th MA Open Champions
(Left to Right): NM Michael Isakov,
FM Mika Brattain, FM Nathan Solon
Photo Credit: Gregory Isakov*



Note from the Editor

Nathan Smolensky

Dear Readers,

This is a big one. I don't mean that just in the sense that this is a double issue – though, yes, it is a 48 page double issue. I mean that in the sense of what's inside the double issue.

We have not one, not two, but three newly crowned state champions (two for the first time ever!) delivering analysis on some spectacular games. We have two superb game spotlights by GM Alexander Ivanov. We have a newly expanded Postal Hub – now a full page!

And perhaps most seriously, we have some very important news on the future of *Chess Horizons* on p. 7. So read on, friends, this is not an issue you'll want to miss!

- Nathan Smolensky, Editor

Annotation / Player Title Key

! – Strong move !! – Brilliant move

? – Weak move ?? – Blunder

!? – Interesting move ?! – Dubious move

± (♣) – White (Black) is slightly better

± (♠) – White (Black) is significantly better

+ - (-+) – White (Black) is winning

∞ - Unclear ⊖ - Zugzwang

□ – Only move ⊕ - Time trouble

NM – National Master, any player over 2200 USCF

FM – FIDE Master. 2300+ FIDE.

SM – Senior Master. 2400+ USCF.

IM – International Master. Norm-based FIDE title.

GM – Grandmaster. Norm-based FIDE title.

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The Challenge Page

Nathan Smolensky

Find the best move! Solutions on p. 46

1.



White to mate in 2

2.



White to move and win

3.



Black to move and win

4.



White to move and win

5.



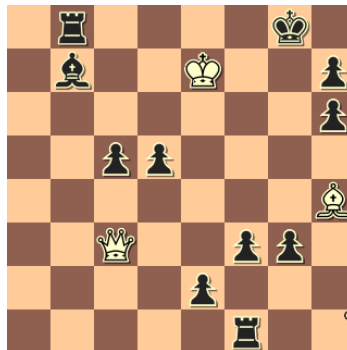
White to NOT mate in 1

6.



White to move and win

7.



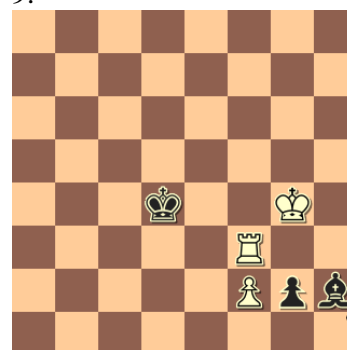
White to move and win

8.



White to move and win

9.



White to move and draw



The Postal Hub

A Place for Those in Search of Correspondence Play

As demand has increased, the time has come to take this popular new Chess Horizons to the next level. If you are currently featured on the Postal Hub, or if you would like to be, please send a sentence or two describing yourself as a player to P.O. Box 381396, Cambridge, MA, 02138.

You can include the following:

- Your approximate strength (either your own estimation, or if you have a USCF tournament record)*
- Your experience / how long you have been playing*
- How frequently you intend to play*
- Anything else you feel is worth noting!*

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Beyond the Horizons

Nathan Smolensky

All good things, as they say, must come to an end.

At the April, 2018 meeting of the MACA Board of Directors, it was determined that a 50th Anniversary special Double Issue of *Chess Horizons*, due out in the middle of 2019, would serve as the final printed edition of the magazine. As both CH editor and MACA President, I was one of the primary proponents of this decision, and as such I feel that I should explain how it came to be.

Chess Horizons serves a multitude of purposes. It is Massachusetts' own chess publication, a repository of our news and notable games from local events. It offers writing and analysis by our finest players, as well as highlights of club activity and stories of human interest within our community. At the same time, this is a magazine circulated widely through prisons across the nation, where it serves as a trove of quality chess content and, as of recently, a hub for players to find correspondence games.

Unfortunately, it is difficult for a single, printed publication to effectively serve all of these purposes. Those looking for local news might want to look instead to MACA's website and social media, which are also far more current than a quarterly publication could ever be. Those looking for analysis by top local players would be just as well off with an active blog, which offers far more in the way of interactive discussion than a printed journal. And those who simply want quality chess games and problems may, as much as it pains me to say this, be served better by archival journals of *New in Chess*, *Chess Informant*, or *Chess Life*, all of which provide content of a caliber far beyond what we can deliver locally.

At the same time, having a printed magazine is increasingly difficult for us from an

organizational standpoint. *Chess Horizons* has been by far the largest use of funds for the MACA budget for some years now, and with major recent expansions in our endeavors in school programs, tournament offerings, and player support, this expense is hard to justify. No easy fix can be found in raising our rates of membership with subscription, either, as such an increase is just as likely to result in fewer members opting for our printed magazine.

Rather than continue to print *Chess Horizons* as we have, it seems logical then for us to take a multi-pronged approach to better fulfilling its varied purposes: to work towards creating an active, bustling blog to serve as a hub for writing and analysis by our top chess minds, to put more into our website and social media to ensure that we do our best in highlighting local achievements as they happen, and to combine a new, focused newsletter (featuring a hub for correspondence play) with the best archival content we can find to create a product well-tailored to the world of prison chess.

For myself, and a number of others on the MACA board, this is not even a matter of choosing to end printed *Chess Horizons*, but deciding when. With costs of printing rising, circulation stagnant, and MACA's other programs demanding more and more of our focus and resources, there seemed to us to be an inevitability to this conclusion. As such, we chose to take the opportunity to plan ahead and handle the end of this era with style, concluding with a 50th Anniversary special that should honor the rich history of this magazine.

One last, very important note I should make – none of this is set in stone. If you don't want printed *Chess Horizons* to end, make your voice heard! Let us know, by email or snail mail, why you want to see it continue, and how you intend to help. And spread the word! The future of our magazine lies now in your hands.



87th Mass Open

Victory in Marlborough: Mika's Story

FM Mika Brattain

FM Mika Brattain (2510)

NM Nithin Kavi (2252)

87th Mass Open (3)

05.27.2018

Sicilian – Rossolimo [B51]

After a mediocre start of 1.5/2, I was able to string together three important wins in a row to keep pace with my rivals and put me in the run for another state championship. My first task was to overcome stubborn defence against Nithin Kavi, who had held Ivanov to a draw with black in the previous round.

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 d6 3. Bb5+ Nd7 4. Ba4!?



A new idea I had seen in Zhrebukh-So from round 1 of the 2018 U.S. Championship. Although Zhrebukh lost the game, I thought his opening idea was worth repeating. There is a lot of well-known theory after 4. O-O a6 5. Bd3 or 4. d4 Ngf6 5. Nc3 cxd4 6. Qxd4, and I figured my opponent would be well prepared for these lines.

4... Ngf6 5. O-O!

This is the main point of White's opening idea. The e4-pawn doesn't need to be defended yet.

5... g6?!

A slight inaccuracy; the fianchetto is less effective when White can expand in the center with c3 and d4.

5... Nxe4 6. Re1 Nef6 7. d4 is dangerous for Black.

5... a6 is probably best. 6. c4 is necessary to restrict Black's queenside and only now g6=

6. Re1 Bg7 7. c3 O-O 8. d4 e5 9. dxe5±

The hole on d5 promises White a small edge.

9... dxe5 10. Bb3 Qc7 11. Nbd2?!

11. Na3! was more accurate. 11... a6 12. Nc4 b5 13. Qd6! was the idea I missed. White should be better here (I had only seen 13. Nd6? c4±)

11... b6

11... b5! equalizes after 12. a4 c4 13. Bc2 and now the strange Ba6! Is quite strong. Black has enough space on the queenside that the weakness of the d5-square is hardly felt.

12. Nc4 h6?

Black cannot afford to play this slowly.

12... Bb7 13. Nd6 offers White some pressure but nothing more.

13. Qd6!± Qxd6 14. Nxd6 Ne8 15. Nxc8

15. Bxf7+! steals a pawn after Rxf7 16. Nxe8. Still, White's advantage in the game was almost as good.

15... Rxc8 16. Nd2 Nd6 17. Nc4 Nxc4 18. Bxc4

With the bishop pair and complete light-square domination, White's position must be very close to a technical win.

18... Rfd8 19. a4 a5 20. Be3 Nf8 21. g3 Ne6 22. Ba6?!

This is where I started to go on a bit of an adventure. I had seen Black was threatening ...Nd4 but moving the bishop away was unnecessary. 22. Kg2 Nd4 23. Rac1 Nc6 24. f4 is likely winning.



22... Rc6 23. Red1 Rcd6 24. Rxd6 Rxd6

25. Kf1 Ng5 26. Bb7 Nf3

It is always important to consider Black's counterplay with 26... f5 but after 27. exf5 gxf5 28. f4! Black will have even more weaknesses.

27. Kg2 Ng5 28. f3?!

It was time for me to end matters with 28. b4! axb4 29. cxb4 cxb4 30. Rb1+-, which would have left Black unable to save his queenside.

28... Bf8 29. h4 Nh7 30. Bd5 Kg7 31. Kf2 f5!

White has waited a little too long and now Black gets some counterplay.

32. Ke2 Nf6 33. Rd1 Ne8?

I am unsure why my opponent chose this retreat. The knight was perfect on f6. I did not know what I was going to do against a waiting move like 33... Be7.

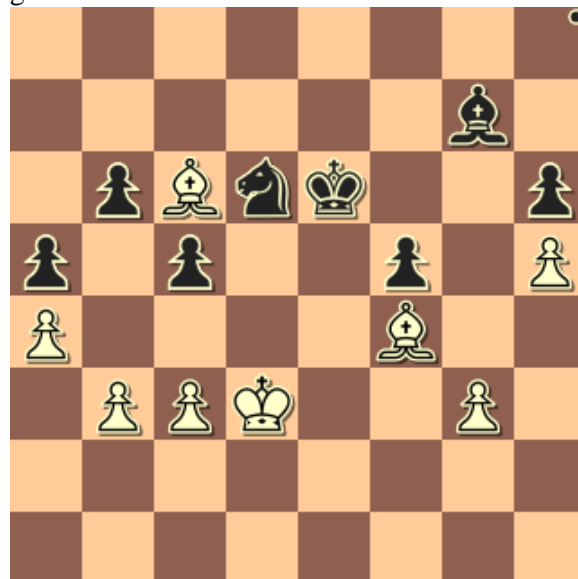
34. f4! exf4 35. Bxf4 Rd7 36. exf5?

36. Be5+! is decisive. Nf6 37. exf5 Re7 (37...gxf5 38. Be6+-) 38. Be6 gxf5 and here I missed that I could defend everything with 39. Rd6+-

36... gxf5 37. Bc6 Rxd1 38. Kxd1 Nd6 39. Kc2 Kf6 40. b3 Ke6 41. h5 Bg7 42. Kd3

With all the rooks traded, I wouldn't be surprised if this ending is now drawn. However, Black has to defend his h6 and f5 pawns and make sure that White never gets in a move like

Bc7, which is not easy to do in a tournament game.



42... Nf7 43. Bb5 Ne5+ 44. Kd2 Kd5 45. Bd3 Ke6 46. Bc4+ Ke7 47. Bd5 Kd6 48. Bb7 Kc7 49. Ba6 Kd6??

Black forgets about the f5-pawn for one move, and the game is over.

49... Kd7 makes it challenging for White to make progress.

50. Bc8+- Kd5 51. Bxf5 c4 52. bxc4+ Nxc4+ 53. Kc2 Nd6 54. Bd3

With White having an extra pawn on the kingside, Black's forces are eventually overwhelmed on both sides of the board.

54... Nf7 55. Be3 Kc6 56. Bg6 Ne5 57. Bf5 Nc4 58. Bc1 Ne5 59. g4 Nf7 60. Bg6 Ng5 61. Kd3 Ne6

Black has established a nice blockade on the kingside, where White has the extra pawn. However, there is little Black can do when White pursues the queenside pawns.

62. Kc4!

62. Ke4 Nc5+ 63. Kf5 Kd7 followed by taking on a4 is unnecessarily complicated.

62... Kd6 63. Bf5 Ng5 64. Be3 Kc6 65. Bg6 Ne6 66. Be4+ Kc7 67. Kb5 Nc5 68. Bf4+ Kc8 69. Bc6 Ne6 70. Be3 Bxc3 71. Bxh6 Kc7 72.

Bd5 Nc5 73. Bf4+ Kd8 74. h6 Nd7 75. g5 Ne5 76. Bxe5

After 61 moves, White finally cedes the bishop pair to force promotion.

76... Bxe5 77. g6

1-0

GM Alexander Ivanov (2588)

FM Mika Brattain (2510)

87th Mass Open (4)

05.27.2018

Caro-Kann [B12]

After round three I had about an hour to prepare for a pivotal matchup with Black against the tournament's favorite. I chose to play the Caro-Kann, which I hadn't been playing very much recently. It must have come as a surprise to my opponent, as he spent 20 minutes on move 2!

1. e4 c6 2. d4 d5 3. e5 Bf5 4. Nd2
e6 5. Nb3 Nd7 6. Nf3 Bg6 7. Be2 Nh6 8. Bf4 a6
9. O-O Nf5 10. g4 Ne7!?

10... Nh4 is the more standard option.

11. Nh4 c5 12. c3 Nc6 13. Bg3 Qb6 14. Nxc6

14. f4 Be4=

14... h×g6 15. Rb1 Be7 16. Kg2 Qd8?



This is the root of Black's problems in this game.

The idea is strategically ambitious: Black wants to trade off White's bishop pair with ...Bh4 and White can't avoid the trade with Bf4 due to ...Bg5. However, all this gives White too much time to build up an initiative.

16... O-O-O! is equal. As will be seen, Black struggles to find king safety and connect his rooks, so it is best to do so immediately.

17. f4 cxd4 18. cxd4 Bh4 19. Rc1 Bxg3 20. hxg3 Qb6 21. Od2!

An excellent, quiet developing move that puts Black under serious pressure.

21... Ne7?

Passive defense against f4-f5, but now Black has no immediate way of untangling.

Black's main problem is that 21... O-O-O? is met by 22. Na5!+- and

21... O-O? is even worse, because White will just mate on the h-file after 22. Rh1

21... Nb4!?, as suggested by my opponent is objectively best and would almost certainly solve Black's problems in a tournament game after his intended 22. a3 (though the computer points out 22. f5!±, which works for bizarre tactical reasons) 22... Na2 23. Ra1 Qxb3 24. Rf3 Qb6 25. Rxa2 Nb8=

22. 0a5

22. Na5 \pm was another way forward.

22... Qxa5?

This should have been the decisive mistake.

22... Nc6 is objectively best, when White should play 23. Qd2. However, with my opponent in his usual time pressure, I was reluctant to let him repeat moves.

23. Nxa5 b6 24. Nc6

We both missed 24. Nb7! which is almost resignable for Black.

24... Nxc6 25. Rxc6 Ke7 26. Rfc1 Rhb8 27. a4!

Fixing the Black queenside pawns on weak squares.

27... b5 28. a5 Kd8 29. f5! Rc8 30. fxe6 fxe6

31. g5!

White is ready to play Bg4 and take everything.

31... Nf8



I had actually considered the position after 31... Rxc6 32. Rxc6 Nf8 33. Bg4 Kd7 several moves ago thinking I had a fortress. Then I realized White can simply play 34. Rd6+ Ke7 35. Kf2, followed by marching his king all the way to b6 via b4 and c5, and the position is hopeless.

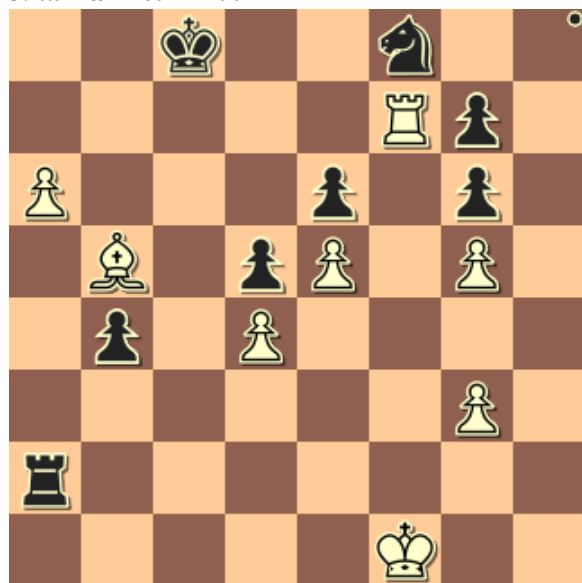
32. Rd6+ Ke7 33. Rxc8 Rxc8 34. Rxa6 Rc2 35. Kf1 Rxb2 36. Ra7+ Kd8 37. a6 b4 38. Rb7 Kc8

White had played a perfect endgame so far but had only a few seconds left to make the next two moves.

39. Bb5

This doesn't spoil anything, but 39. Rxc7+ followed by Rg8 is cleanly winning.

39... Ra2 40. Rf7??



This costs White his entire advantage.

40. Rxc7+ is once again winning, but with a few seconds on the clock a move like b3 looks a little dangerous. With so little time, it is understandable to choose a more forcing move that comes with tempo.

40... Nh7 41. Bd7+ Kd8 42. Bxe6 Nxc5 43. Rd7+ Ke8 44. Rd6 Ne4!

44... Nxe6 45. Rxe6+ Kf7 46. Rb6 b3 47. Rxb3 Rxa6 should be a draw, but it looked very unpleasant.

45. Rb6 Nxc3+

45... Nd2+! is an incredible forced draw after 46. Ke1 Nf3+ 47. Kd1 b3! 48. Bxd5 (48. Rxb3?? Ra1+ loses the rook) 48... Rd2+ 49. Kc1 Rc2+ 50. Kd1 (50. Kb1 \$4 Nd2+ 51. Ka1 Ra2#) 50... Rd2+

46. Ke1 Ne4 47. Bg4

The inhuman 47. Bg8! is the only way to keep Black under pressure. White clears the way to play e6 while maintaining latent pressure on the d5 pawn.

47... b3 48. Rxb3 Rxa6 49. Ke2 Ra4!

Black has enough counterplay against the surprisingly vulnerable d4-pawn.

50. Ke3 Ng3! 51. Kf4 Nh5+ 52. Ke3 (52. Bxh5 Rxd4+=) 52... Ng3 53. Rb8+ Ke7 54. Rb7+ Kf8 55. Rb8+ Ke7 56. Rb7+ Kf8

White has no way to make progress due to Black's counterplay against the d4-pawn, as ...Nf5+ is always a threat. Around here my opponent had under 10 seconds and I assumed he would repeat moves.

57. Rd7

This surprised me, not only because he wanted to play on with just a few seconds left, but because I felt that I was the only one who could be better in the resulting rook ending.

57... Nf5+ 58. Bxf5 gxf5 59. Rxd5 g5 60. Rd7

White should really bail out with 60. e6 when he captures one of Black's connected passed pawns with no losing chances.

60... Ra3+ 61. Kd2 g4

Here my opponent's flag fell, as solving this position for White is not trivial. The Black pawns are more dangerous than White's, and it is easier for White to go wrong. One possible drawing line runs: 62. e6 g3 63. Rf7+ Ke8 64. d5! (64. Rxf5?? g2+) 64... Ra5 (64... g2!? 65. d6! Ra2+ results in a crazy draw by perpetual check.) 65. Rg7 Rxd5+ 66. Ke3 Re5+ 67. Kf4 Rxe6 68. Rxc3=

0-1



FM Mika Brattain (2510)

IM David Vigorito (2434)

87th Mass Open (5)

05.28.2018

Nimzo-Larsen Attack [A01]

Going into round 5, I was one of three players with 3.5/4 and paired against my former teacher. I figured he was mentally prepared for me to pursue a safe and risk-free advantage with White, so I thought it was a good opportunity to roll the dice.

1. b3 e5 2. Bb2 Nc6 3. e3 Nf6 4. Nf3!?

A sideline that bothered me with Black, so I decided I would try it with White.

4. Bb5 is the main line but it is pretty well-known Black is fine after Bd6 or even e4!?

4... e4 5. Nd4 Nxd4

5... Bc5 is the other principled reply, leading into 6. Nxc6 dxc6 with unbalanced but equal play. Black has easy development but has to be careful not to lose the entire center after a break like d3 or f3

6. Bxd4 d5?!



It is hard to believe a move this natural can be a mistake, but this line of the Larsen can be counterintuitive. Black should not let his center pawns get traded so easily, and should instead

concentrate on development with a move like 6... Be7.

7. c4!± dxc4?!

Now White's lead in development starts to get out of hand. 7... c6 8. Nc3 is pleasant for White but nothing more.

8. Bxc4 c5?

After this Black might already be losing. Getting developed with 8... Be7 was once again needed.

9. Bxf6 Qxf6 10. Nc3 Qe5 11. f4! exf3

11... Qe7 is more principled but after 12. Bb5+! Bd7 13. Bxd7+ Kxd7 14. d3+- White's attack is decisive.

12. Qxf3 Bd6!? 13. Qxf7+ Kd8 14. Qd5 Rf8

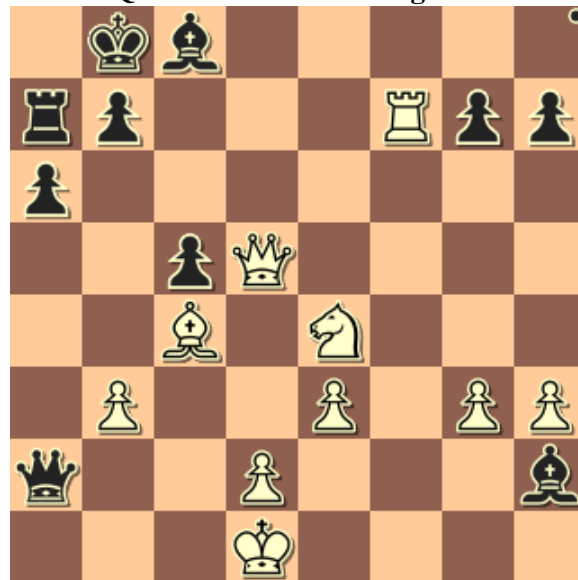
15. O-O-O a6 16. Rhf1 Rxf1 17. Rxf1 Kc7

18. Rf7+ Kb8 19. h3 Ra7 20. Ne4!

Black is faced with an impossible choice. Qa1+ offers a few checks but a fatally weak king.

20... Qxd5 21. Bxd5+- and White will emerge at least two pawns ahead in the endgame.

21. Kc2 Qxa2+ 22. Kd1 Bh2 23. g3



There is no defence to Qd6+ and Rf8. White's pawns on d2 and e3 in the final position represent a win for the hypermodern school.

With a draw in the last round, my reclamation of (a share of) the state championship was sealed.

1-0



2018 U.S. Amateur Team East Tartan Glory in Parsippany

NM Grant Xu

One of Massachusetts' strongest scholastic players throughout the late 2000's and early 2010's, NM Grant Xu left for college at Pittsburgh's Carnegie Mellon University in 2015. Though busy with studies, his chess play has not stopped, as evidenced by a triumphant visit to the biggest tournament on the East Coast earlier this year.

The 2018 US Amateur Team East was my 8th time playing in the tournament. I've played in every event since 2010, with the exception of 2016, when I was a freshman in college. It is always one of my favorite events to play in mainly because it is so unique. It is one of the few tournaments (besides the Pan Ams and some local scholastic events) that is team-based, and few others carry with it the type of unique prestige that "The Team" carries. It is also an incredibly tough event to win: beating out 300+ other teams in just six rounds leaves minimal margin for error and demands a good amount of luck. It's always been an obsession of mine before each year's event to try to craft the best possible team to win it all. Excluding the first 2-3 years, every team I've been on has been rated at least 2150 and had hopes of winning it all. In 2014, my team (featuring now-GM Akshat Chandra on board 1) tied for first with Princeton, ultimately losing out on tiebreaks. Coming that close to the gold stung quite a bit, but in 2018 the stars finally aligned.

Before the Event

Around the end of December, I began discussing with manager Beilin Li on possible lineups we could send to the tournament. Looking at the list of chess players at Carnegie Mellon, we considered four-player combos that could fit under the 2200 rating cap. I casually mentioned the lineup that would ultimately

become our team, and we were shocked to see the average rating came out to 2199.75, the highest possible average! It was even more remarkable because we were choosing from a very limited pool of players, while other teams have complete freedom to maximize their team averages. I had to double and triple check just to make sure the numbers were right, but if this wasn't a "dream team", nothing would be. The roster was as follows:

Board 1: Grant Xu (2403 USCF)

Board 2: David Itkin (2247 USCF)

Board 3: Beilin Li (2093 USCF)

Board 4: Ryan Christianson (2056 USCF)

Beyond the rating average, there were many reasons to be optimistic. David, a first-year PhD student from Canada, had played USCF-tournaments very infrequently, and thus was very underrated in the US rating system. His Canadian rating was around 2350, and his FIDE rating mirrored his US rating. This meant we were rolling out two players of about 2400 US strength on boards 1 and 2.

Our Board 3, Beilin Li, had achieved his master title with a rating of 2200 half a year ago, only to see his rating slide after several poor performances. Beilin drew now-GM Aman Hambleton at the 2017 Team, and had a great record against IMs, giving us confidence in his ability to perform solidly on Board 3.

We fully expected Ryan to be our rock on Board 4, with him possibly being one of the highest rated Board 4s in the tournament. Historically, the success of USATE winners have been determined by their Board 4s. Winning teams either have a strong expert destroying all the other Board 4s, or a highly underrated 1700-1800 player able to score upsets against stronger opposition.

Lastly, this team was a replica of our 2017 team, with the exception that David replaced Alex Hallenbeck (~2025 USCF). That team started 4.5/5 and was in contention in the last



round of the 2017 USATE, before losing in the final round. Thus, we were replacing a player on an already good team with someone 200-300 rating points higher.

All in all, this meant we had a lineup that could perform 2400-2400-2200-2050, which was basically a cheat code. The only things that would stand in our way were rust and the sheer difficulty of winning such a large event. There was not much time to prepare or practice either, as the team was up past midnight finishing up homework assignments in the hotel room.

Round 1

We left Friday night and stayed halfway to avoid waking up at 6 AM on Saturday to make a 5.5 hour drive. This left us a little bit more well rested than in previous years. Round 1 went pretty smoothly, as we defeated our opponents 4-0. Can you find the combination my opponent missed here?



Xu, G – Kobas, A, position after 19...h6

Answer: Qf7+ Kh8 Qxf6, with the threat of Nf7+, wins. The immediate Nf7 fails to Be8!

I began suffering from an intense headache as soon as this round ended. A quick nap eased the throbbing a little bit, but it continued into the

night through the second round. It's tough to say whether my headaches throughout the tournament should be attributed to fatigue or sickness, but it was something that fortunately did not affect my play significantly or hurt the team much.

Round 2

Because of the accelerated pairings, we already had a tough match in Round 2 against a Masterman team with a rating average over 2100. I got into one of the most visibly horrifying positions I've ever been in out of the opening against a much lower-rated master. See for yourself:



Hernandez-Camen, A – Xu, G, after 16... Bf8

Not great to only have one piece developed and your king pushed out on move 16.

As became a recurring occurrence through the tournament, the bottom three boards scored a quick and easy 2.5/3, leaving my sad excuse for a game to be the last one to finish. Somehow, I ended up pulling out a win after more than four hours, which was helpful to our team's tiebreaks. However, this was clearly not the way I wanted to be playing, particularly against lower-rated opposition.



Round 3

The pairings quickly became tougher, as we were paired against the team “Stable Geniuses” (average rating 2160+), led by IM Alexander Katz. This was perhaps the only round that our team even came close to not winning the match. I quickly botched up a move order on move 6, and was never able to recover. Beilin was getting absolutely trounced on Board 3, at one point being -9 according to the computer evaluation. After some time passed, David and Ryan cruised to easy wins. With my game being dead lost, Beilin somehow swindled his way to a win by taking advantage of his opponent’s time pressure. This allowed us to win the match 3-1 instead of drawing the match 2-2. Even a lost half-point can be critical when chasing first place at USATE, so we certainly dodged a bullet there.

Starting this round, I also started to feel the uncomfortable effects of food poisoning. Note to readers: beware of rest stop pizza and/or McDonald’s sandwiches (I still don’t know which one it was). Fortunately, it didn’t affect any of my other teammates, and just like the headaches, didn’t seriously decrease my level of play. From this point on though, it was physically and mentally exhausting to play each game, especially since every one of my opponents from round 3 and onward were rated over 2450.

Round 4

The next round, we played a team with a very similar structure as ours (average rating 2190+), led by Brandon Jacobson. We were slightly outrated on boards 1 and 2 and held a larger rating edge on board 4. Beilin won an exchange around move 15 and won easily on board 3. I survived another sketchy opening position to win a decent (albeit far from perfect) game with an attack I enjoyed playing:

FM Brandon Jacobson (2458)

NM Grant Xu (2403)

U.S. Amateur Team East (4)

02.18.2018

Reti Opening [A04]

1. Nf3 b5

Completely sidestepping any theory.

2. e4 Bb7 3. Bxb5 Bxe4 4. O-O Nf6 5. d4 e6 6. c4 Be7 7. Nc3 Bb7 8. d5 O-O 9. Bf4 Ne8 10. Ba4 d6 11. Be3 e5 12. c5 dxc5 13. Nxe5 Nf6 14. Nc6 Nxc6 15. dxc6 Ba6

Black’s position is far from ideal, but my opponent plays inaccurately the next couple of moves and fails to solidify an advantage.

16. Re1 Rb8 17. Bf4 Rb4 18. Be5 Bd6 19. Bxd6 cxd6 20. b3 d5

Now Black should be OK.

21. Qf3 Bc8 22. h3 Qd6 23. Rac1 a6 24. Red1 Be6 25. Qe2 Rh4! 26. Qxa6??



White goes pawn-grabbing, and admitted after the game he missed Black’s next move. Can you find it?

26... Ng4! -+

The knight is untouchable. A sample line is
 27. hxg4 Qh2+ 28. Kf1 Bxg4 29. f3 Bxf3
 30. gxf3 Qh1+ 31. Ke2 Rh2+ 32. Ke3 Re8+
 33. Kf4 Rh4+ 34. Kf5 Qxf3+ 35. Kg5 Qf4#



27. Qd3 Qh2+ 28. Kf1



Can you find the only winning move here?

28... Nxf2!

Any other move is unclear at best.

29. Kxf2 Rf4+ 30. Ke1 Qg1+ 31. Kd2 Qxg2+ 32. Ne2 Rd4 33. Qxd4 cxd4 34. c7 Qe4 35. Bb5 Bf5 36. Ke1 Qh1+ 37. Kd2 Qh2 38. Ke1 Rc8 39. Nxd4 Qg3+ 40. Kd2 Qf4+ 41. Ke1 Rxc7 42. Rxc7 Qxc7 43. Nxf5 Qe5+ 44. Be2 Qxf5

The game went on, but the rest was conversion.

0-1

Now up 2-0, we saw that Ryan was slightly better in an endgame he could not lose, so at the very least we knew match victory was in hand. Of course, tiebreaks were always in the back of our minds, especially considering my team's experience in 2014. An extra half or full point can go a long way should tiebreaks come into play. All of a sudden, David's opponent flagged in a dominating position, and we won the match 3.5-0.5.

Round 5

We got the pairings for the fifth round the night before, and we knew we would have our hands full. We were paired against a top-heavy team (2500-2460-1900-1900) with their 1900 on board 3 having a perfect 4-0 score going into the round. The morning of the round, the food poisoning started to really hit me, and I barely ate anything for breakfast. My body was rejecting everything and the only thing I ended up eating the whole day was watermelon for lunch and a granola bar.

The advantage of having a more balanced lineup and stronger players on the bottom boards really proved valuable in this round. Ryan and Beilin scored for us on the bottom boards, allowing myself and David a little breathing room in our games. I chickened out and played an Exchange French, which seemed to irk my opponent, IM Alexander Ostrovskiy. David and I both knew any non-losing result would be great for the team, and I made the decision to dry out the position instantly. Even in a dead-drawn endgame, I almost botched things but was able to hold.

David had a lot more courage, and played a highly interesting King's Indian game that also ended in a draw, so we won the match 3-1.

Round 6

Going into the last round, there were three teams on 5-0: ourselves, "Very Fine People on Both Sides", and MIT. We were paired with "Very Fine People", and MIT was paired to the highest team with 4.5. Everyone on our team knew what we were playing for, and we just had to play the same chess that had gotten us this far already. I faced the stiffest competition in IM Jan Van de Mortel, while the other three boards held very slight rating edges. Before any of our games finished, it became clear that MIT was going to lose their match, so the winner of our match would be taking it all.



In rapid succession, Ryan won on board 4, Beilin won on board 3, and David won on board 2. In the span of five minutes, we had taken a 3-0 lead and clinched the title. It felt surreal that we won the tournament. While the others deservedly went to relax, I was tempted to resign my terrible position against Van de Mortel. Alas, I hunkered down for another hour and managed to draw, giving us a dominating 3.5-0.5 victory in the final round.

After the Event

There was no champagne popped nor wild celebrations as we got ready for the grueling 5.5 hour drive back to Pittsburgh, but there was a great sense of accomplishment and pride in what we had done. I would dare to say we were relieved too, as we came in with very high expectations, and top seeds rarely win the tournament.

I would like to give a huge shoutout to my teammates, all of whom had incredible 5.5/6 scores and dominated the whole tournament. In fact, had I lost all of my games, we would have still gone 6-0! Overall the team scored 20.5/24 and our only individual loss was my round 3 loss to Katz. I have not checked historical performances, but 20.5 game points has to be close to a record for USATE. Again, a lot of luck in terms of roster construction was on our side, as our post-tournament rating average was over 2230!



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*Mass G/60***Slam Dunk**

FM Nathan Solon

When my alarm went off on the morning of the Mass G/60, I turned it off and went back to sleep. But I kept waking up. The feeling I might be missing an opportunity was nagging at me, so at the last possible second I called the TD, explained I was running late, and begged him to enter me. He agreed and I jumped in my car for the 45-minute drive to the Best Western.

On the ride I established a pattern that would serve me well throughout the day. Namely, I didn't think much about chess, and instead focused on the NBA Playoffs. After 45 minutes of NBA podcasts, I arrived at the hotel feeling relaxed and ready to play.

Nonetheless, the first round didn't go smoothly. I completely failed to outplay Sebastian Gueler despite having a few hundred rating points on him. Eventually, we reached a position in mutual time pressure where I had a perpetual check. He made eye contact with me, evidently expecting a draw offer. With the perpetual in hand, I felt obligated to at least try something, so I made a random threat somewhere else on the board. To my surprise, he used his five second increment...then his remaining 25 seconds, letting his time expire. It wasn't pretty, but I had my first win.

Sometimes an undeserved win can get you back on track. Round two went more smoothly: I was the lucky recipient of an opening blunder from Jerry Li and just had to not screw it up to get my second win.

In round three I was paired against Brandon Wu. We had played once before and drew; I had the impression that he was a solid positional player, so I was looking to mix things up.

FM Nathan Solon (2325)
 NM Brandon Wu (2212)
 Mass G/60 Championship (3)
 04.15.2018
 Queen's Pawn Game [A45]

1. d4 Nf6 2. Bf4 g6 3. Nc3

I like to do this sometimes against King's Indian and Grunfeld players to try to take them out of their comfort zone. The idea is to play e4.

4... d5

Black stops e4 and can argue that the knight on c3 is misplaced, but (hopefully) he's a little uncomfortable playing with his pawn on d5.

4. e3 Bg7 5. h4

This looks ridiculous, but is surprisingly hard to defuse. Even the super-solid Karjakin has played it.

5... h6?!

Both h5, halting the h-pawn, and 0-0, ignoring the provocation, are fine. Black tries to split the difference, but unfortunately gets the worst of both worlds: he spends a move and weakens his kingside, allowing White to retain the possibility of a pawn break there.

6. Nf3 a6 7. Ne5 b6



This is just way too many pawn moves on the edge of the board. Black's position is already extremely dangerous.

8. g4 Bb7 9. Bg2?!

The bishop is doing just fine on f1. Qf3, with ideas of g5 or 0-0-0, was the right way to play. Given that Ne4 is refuted by Nxf7, it's difficult for black to even continue the game.

9... Nbd7 10. Qd3 Nxe5 11. Bxe5

11. dxe5 Nxe4 12. e6 is interesting, but there's no need to rock the boat.

11... Qd7 12. O-O-O e6

I was hoping for 12... O-O-O 13. Nxd5 Bxd5 14. Qxa6+ Kb8 15. Qxb6+ Kc8 16. Qa6+ Kb8 17. Rd3 with a winning attack.

He was also wise to avoid 12... Qxg4, when White would have the choice between the simple 13. Bxf6 Bxf6 14. Bxd5 or the more ambitious 13. Bh3, in both cases with big problems for black.

13. e4

I also considered 13. g5 Nh5 14. Bxg7 Nxg7 15. e4 O-O-O 16. exd5 exd5 17. Bh3 Ne6 but couldn't find a clear way forward here.

13... O-O-O?

Wrong way! 13... O-O would have left white with several promising options, but no immediate kill.

14. exd5 exd5 15. g5

There's no good way to avoid a deadly pin on the h3-c8 diagonal.

15... hxe5 16. hxe5 Ng4

16... Qg4 17. Bh3 Rxh3 18. Qxh3 Qxh3 19. Rxh3 Ne8 20. Bxg7 Nxg7 21. Rh7 would be an easily winning ending.

17. Bxg7 Nxf2 18. Qf3 Rxh1 19. Rxh1

My opponent resigned because he is losing loads of material. An amusing finish would have been 19. Rxh1 Nxh1 20. Bh3 f5 21. gxf6 - a devastating en passant!

1-0

I knew I would face the winner of the game that had been taking place next to me in round

three, Carissa Yip vs. Steven Winer on board one. When I left, they were battling it out in a sharp endgame with a minor piece against three pawns, and I had no idea what to expect as I sat down to watch the Celtics play the 76ers in the hotel bar.

After a while I spotted Carissa and Steven walking by. As they were both chatting amiably. I couldn't get a read on what happened. Feeling it would be out of place to ask who won, I scurried back to the tournament room and read the result from the wallchart: Carissa pulled it out.

I started checking a few of Carissa's recent games on my phone, but what I found was dismaying on two fronts: first, she was mixing up her openings quite unpredictably; and second, she had recently beaten several strong grandmasters. Rather than psych myself out further, I went back to watching the basketball game.

FM Nathan Solon (2325)

FM Carissa Yip (2360)

Mass G/60 Championship (4)

04.15.2018

Queen's Pawn Game [D02]

1. d4 d5 2. Bf4 c5

Had I prepared something, it would have been for black - this was my third white of the tournament, which I wasn't expecting. My decision to watch basketball was looking good, at least. However, I was a bit concerned by the speed with which my opponent bashed out this move. When people play 2... c5, they usually have something specific in mind.

3. e3 Nc6 4. Nf3 Nf6 5. Nbd2 Bf5

More common is 5... Qb6, for which I intended to sac a pawn via 6. dxc5

6. c3 Qb6 7. Nh4

The only way for white to try for an advantage.

7. Qb3 c4 8. Qxb6 axb6 favors black thanks to



the open a-file and the possibility of a b5-b4 break.

7... Bd7 8. Qb3 Rc8

This is a little vague. Normal would be c4.

9. dxc5 Qxc5 10. Qxb7?

Leaving aside whether Black gets enough compensation for the pawn (she does), this is a terribly impractical decision, giving my opponent an attack and a clear plan. More prudent was 10. Nhf3, which keeps the game under control.

10... e5 11. Nb3 Qd6 12. Bg3 Ne4 13. Bb5 f5?

The computer points out 13... Rb8 14. Qa6 Rb6 15. Qa4 Qb8! They say diagonal queen retreats are the hardest moves to spot...

14. f4?

My initial inclination of 14. O-O-O intending f4 15. exf4 exf4 16. Rhe1 would have been better. But not as good as 14. Nxf5! Bxf5 15. Na5 Bd7 16. Bxc6 Rxc6 17. Bxe5 Qe6 18. Nxc6 Bxc6 19. Qb8+ Kf7 20. Bd4, another computer suggestion. In any case it feels a little unfair throwing out all these question marks - in a position like this, the computer will always make you look bad.

14... Nc5?



This move looks extremely strong, and when it landed on the board I thought I had lost, but it turns out to have an unexpected flaw.

15. fxe5! Qh6 16. Nxc5 Bxc5

The key point is that after 16... Qxe3+ 17. Kf1 Bxc5 18. Re1 Qd2 19. e6, White's king is miraculously safe, while Black falls under a devastating attack. So now I was able to breathe a sigh of relief as I got to castle. Of course, the position is still far from clear, but momentum seemed to be on my side.

17. O-O Rb8 18. Qa6 Rb6 19. Qa4 O-O

20. Kh1 Be7?

20... g5 21. Nf3 Bxe3 and it's still anyone's game.

21. Nf3 Rfb8

Walking right into a discovered attack, this looks like a simple case of exhaustion after a day of playing and a wild middle game struggle. From here it's relatively smooth sailing for White.

22. e6! Rxb5 23. Bxb8 Ra5 24. Qb3 Bxe6 25. Nd4 Nxd4 26. exd4

1-0

Mikhail Tal said, "You must take your opponent into a deep, dark forest where $2 + 2 = 5$ and the way leading out is only wide enough for one." In this tournament, I felt like I was the one in the forest, but somehow I made it out unscathed.

And on top of all that, the Celtics won.



Game Spotlight

Sarkar – Ivanov, National Chess Congress 2017

GM Alexander Ivanov

IM Justin Sarkar (2436)

GM Alexander Ivanov (2555)

National Chess Congress (6)

11.26.2017

Old Indian, Ukranian Variation [A54]

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 d6 3. Nc3 e5 4. Nf3 e4?!

Theory frowns on this move after which the pawn on e4 becomes a target. White can either win it or at least trade it for the less valuable side pawn on g2, keeping a strong center. Black's main consolation is that the position becomes unbalanced. Much more common is 4... Nbd7, which transposes to King's Indian positions, sometimes with a black bishop on e7.

5. Nd2 Qe7

5... Bf5 6. g4!?± is a known alternative

6. e3 g6

If 6... Bf5 then 7. Be2 h5 (to stop g4) 8. 0-0 g6 9. f3! exf3 10. Bxf3±, opening the center on White's terms

7. Qc2 Bf5 8. g4 Bxg4 9. Bg2 Nbd7 10. Ndx e4 c6 11. Nxf6+?!



White has a space advantage and shouldn't trade pieces. Better was 11. Ng3!? Nb6 (11... Nh5)

12. b3 Bg7 13. Ba3±

11... Nxf6

Now Black can breathe easier.

12. e4 Bg7 13. Be3 0-0 14. f3 Be6 15. Ne2

15. b3= looked more natural, but perhaps White was already preparing to castle long.

15. d5? cxd5 16. cxd5 Bxd5!±

15... Nh5

15... d5 16. cxd5 cxd5 17. e5 Nh5 18. 0-0!?=

16. 0-0-0?!

This is perhaps too risky, but White is playing for a win. To castle the other way was also dubious: 16. 0-0?! f5!?±

16. Ng3 was the best option, but it's hard for a human player to find the following computer lines 16... Qh4 17. Qd2!∞ (17. 0-0-0?! Nf4±) 17... Nxc3?! (17... Bf6!±; 17... h6!±) 18. hxc3 Qxc3+?! (18... Qe7=) 19. Kd1! (19. Kf1 g5□) 19... g5□ 20. Kc2±

16... d5± 17. cxd5 cxd5 18. Kb1 f5 19. Nc3

19. e5? f4 20. Bf2 Bf5±

19... dxe4 20. fxe4 f4

This leads to a very unbalanced position with White letting the black pawn to f3 but keeping his strong pawn center. Black could choose a simpler

According to Stockfish, Black is somewhat better after 20... fxe4!? 21. d5 (21. Nxe4? Rac8 22. Qd3 Bc4!±; 21. Bxe4 Nf6 22. Bg5 Qd7±) 21... Bg4 22. Rd2 Nf6!? 23. d6 Qe8±

21. Bf2 f3 22. Bf1 Rac8 23. Qd2

23. d5!? Bd7± 24. Bxa7?! Bxc3 25. bxc3 b6!

26. d6 Qe5 27. Rd4 Nf6 28. Bxb6 Rb8 29. Qb3+ Kg7 30. Bd3 f2!±

23... Nf4?!

Probably my only mistake in this game. Black should have rerouted the Knight to the neighboring g4 square 23... Nf6!? 24. e5 (24. Bh4 Qb4±; 24. d5 Rxc3!±) 24... Ng4±

24. Be3 Qh4 25. d5?



Beware the natural moves! It's hard to believe, but this is the decisive mistake. During the post mortem, we agreed that 25. Ka1 a6+ was better.

25... Bxc3

Looks counterintuitive, but this move allows all the remaining black pieces to pounce on the white king from different directions

25... Bd7?! 26. Bf2!?∞

26. bxc3 Ne2!

26... Ng2 is also interesting.

27. dxe6

27. Bxe2 fxe2 28. Qxe2 Qxe4+ +

27... Rfd8!-+

I saw this line when I played 24... Qh4
Less clear is 27... Nxc3+ 28. Kb2 Nxd1+ 29.
Qxd1 Qxe4 30. Qd3 Qxe6

28. Bd4

Forced.

28. Qxd8+ Rxd8 29. Rxd8+ Qxd8 30. Bxe2 fxe2
31. Kc2 Qh4 32. Kd2 Qxe4-+ is an easy technical win

28... Nxc3+ 29. Ka1

I was expecting the more stubborn 29. Bxc3
Rxd2 30. Bxd2 (30. Rxd2 Rxc3-+) 30... Qxe4+
31. Ka1 Qd4+! (less clear is 31... Rc2 32. Bc1
Qa4?! 33. Bb2 Rxb2 34. Rd8+!) 32. Kb1 Rc6-+,
and Black is winning, for example 33. e7 Rb6+
34. Kc2 Qb2+ 35. Kd3 Rd6+ 36. Ke3 (36. Kc4
Rd4+ 37. Kc5 Qb6#) 36... Qd4+ 37. Kxf3 Rf6+

38. Ke2™ Re6+ 39. Kf3 Rxe7!?!-+ and Black will soon win one of White's pieces

29... Nxd1 30. e7

Setting the last trap

30. Qxd1 Qxe4-+

30... Qxe7

Hoping for 30... Rxd4? 31. e8Q+! Rxe8 32.

Qxd4∞ Qxe4?? (Only the superhuman 32...

Ne3!! is good here, leading to 33. Qxe3 Rxe4∞)

33. Bc4+ Kf8 34. Qf6#!

31. Qxd1 Qb4

Preventing 32. Qb3+. And here, White resigned.

0-1

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87th Mass Open

Victory in Marlborough: Michael's Story

NM Michael Isakov

Before I begin, I would like to thank several people without whom I would have never achieved this momentous stage in my chess career. In particular, I would like to recognize two coaches who have worked with me over the years: Vladimir Levin, who helped sustain my interest in chess and taught me up to the time I achieved a rating of around 1800, and IM Mikhail Shur, who helped me get from that point to the strong master I am today. IM Shur also helped me with the analysis presented here.

GM Alexander Ivanov (2573)

NM Michael Isakov (2252)

87th Mass Open (5)

05.28.2018

Sicilian, Najdorf [B90]

Even after beating Alan Song in round 4 to rebound from my earlier loss to FM Nathan Solon, I was hardly thinking about a 1st place finish. With 3 points out of 4, I was paired with top seed GM Alexander Ivanov, who was clearly looking for a win after a disappointing defeat at the hands of Mika Brattain. In hindsight, however, it's clear that if anyone was going to catch Brattain or Solon in the final two rounds, this game was going to be a critical one.

1. e4 c5 2. Nf3 d6 3. d4 cxd4 4. Nxd4 Nf6 5. Nc3 a6 6. h3

A tricky move, and one that is becoming more popular at the higher levels

6... g6 7. g4 Bg7 8. Bg2 0-0 9. Be3 Bd7

9... Bd7 can likely be delayed with 9... Nc6, which gives Black a few more options. That being said, both of us go for a fairly straightforward setup in anticipation of a tactical battle.

10. Qd2 Nc6 11. 0-0-0 b5 12. Kb1 b4 13. Nd5 Rb8

Here, White has a critical decision to make. If they do nothing, I can simply take on d5, trade on d4, and get a relatively safe position. The e7 weakness is likely not enough to cause me significant trouble.

14. Bh6!?

A clever move that forced me to take about 20 minutes to reply. White threatens to take on f6, and the rash 14... Nxe4 runs into 15. Bxe4 Bxd4 16. Bxf8 Qxf8 17. f4! and I have no time to consolidate and get compensation through a queenside attack.

14... Nxd5 15. exd5 Bxh6 16. Qxh6 Nxd4 17. Rxd4 f5!



The point behind 14... Nxd5. Without this move, White plays g5, and the rook swing to h4 becomes a nightmare. Instead, I stall White's attack while attempting to activate the bishop on d7. Although the computer shows a slight advantage for White, I believe this position to offer dynamic counterplay.

18. Qd2!

Instead of attempting to salvage his old plan, Ivanov correctly decides to regroup. The queen on d2 is, curiously, more engaged than the queen on h6, since the h7 pawn can now be easily defended with Rf7. Notably, 18. g5?! runs into



18... Rf7 19. h4 Qf8! and White's hope for an attack is crushed.

18... a5 19. g5 Qb6 20. f4?!

Ivanov reasonably tries to shut down any potential pawn sacrifice on f4, which would allow me to add my bishop to the attack via the f5 square. Unfortunately, this seemingly logical move delays the main plan h4–h5, losing a critical tempo in the game. White could have maintained a complex balance with 20. h4 a4 followed by 21. h5!? gxh5 22. Rd3 f4 23. Rxh5 Be8 24. Rh6 Bg6 or 21. b3 f4 22. Bh3 Bxh3 23. Rh3 Qb5 24. Qe1!? Rf5

20... a4?

An inaccuracy. As shown in the game, the pawn on a4 only symbolically increases the pressure on the queenside, and is likely just a lost tempo. Instead, the game could have continued 20... Rfc8 21. h4 Rc7 22. h5 Rbc8 23. Rc1 gxh5 24. Rd3 Rc3! with a complicated position where Black might be able to claim a small advantage.

21. Rd3 Rfc8 22. h4 Rc7 23. h5

Both sides have begun their attacks, but I must relieve the pressure on my king before continuing mine.



23... gxh5 24. Qe2?!

It seems unfair to call this incredibly natural move dubious, but, in light of a plan missed by both of us over the board, it was better to play

24. Bf3. From a glance it may look like one of us is going to get mated, it is not entirely clear how either of us should carry out our attack...

24... Be8 25. Bf3 Rbc8?

I crack under the pressure. Much better was 26... Qc5, which ties up the queen on e2 and buys me enough time to build up my own attack. The hasty 26. Bxh5 runs into 26... Bxh5 27. Rxh5 b3! 28. axb3 axb3 29. c3 Qa7! —+, so White is forced to switch to playing defense.

26. Bxh5 Bxh5?

Now both in extreme time trouble, we begin to exchange blunders. It was better to play 26... e5 straight away, thus forcing White to give up a crucial tempo to move the queen to h5.

27. Qxh5 e5



28. g6?

With seconds to go, Ivanov overlooks what would have likely been the finishing blow:

28. Rdh3 Rg7 29. Qh6 Qc7 30. Qe6+ Rd7 31. c4! (the more human R3h2 also works) Qd7 32. c5 +-. Interestingly, another tempting line might not be sufficient for victory: 28. Qh6?! Qf2 29. Qe6+ Kh8 30. Rxh7+ Rxh7 31. Qxc8+ Kg7 32. Qd7+ Kg7 33. Qd8+ Kg7 34. Rd1 Qf3! and while White undoubtedly stands better, it is not immediately obvious how they should advance. The richness of the position is evident



in that with just one move, White has essentially squandered their advantage.

28... Qf2

While the game is certainly far from over, the position is now in Black's favor. White must quickly regroup and defend the c2 square, for instance: 29. Rc1 e4!? 30. Rh3, but after 30... Qf4 White is going to suffer.

As sometimes happens in time trouble, the clock puts more pressure on my opponent than the actual position, and he flags 12 moves before the time control.

Despite winning the game, I was unable to bridge the half point deficit behind Solon and Brattain, and my only hope lay in the fact that they would play each other in the last round.

0-1

NM Michael Isakov (2252)

IM David Vigorito (2434)

87th Mass Open (6)

05.28.2018

Queen's Pawn Game [A45]

Going into the last round, I trailed Nathan Solon and Mika Brattain with 4. 5/5 ! by half a point. With the co-leaders paired with each other, I was set to play with 3rd seeded IM David Vigorito, with 3. 5 points. While my opponent was not contending for first place, considering that only a victory could get him a share of either second or third place, an exciting battle was to be expected.

1. d4 Nf6 2. Nf3 g6 3. c4 Bg7 4. Nc3 0-0 5. e4 d6 6. Be2 e5 7. dxe5

This is a relatively quiet line, which is often followed by a trade of queens and subsequently a draw. In this game, however, both of us strive for more than that.

7... dxe5 8. 0-0 Nbd7 9. Qc2 c6 10. Rd1 Qe7 11. h3 Nh5

A common idea in the King's Indian; by rerouting the knight to f4, Black can apply pressure on the queenside while simultaneously clearing the way for a thematic f5.

12. Bg5

I do not really intend the bishop to stay on g5, but rather seek to force Black to commit to moving the f-pawn or block the path of his own pawn.

12... f6 13. Be3 Nf4 14. Bf1 Ne6!

While in many similar positions with a pawn on f7, the knight might stay on f4 and Black's attack would continue along the lines of Qf6 and g5, Vigorito correctly judges that the knight is better off on e6. It is too soon to play 14... f5, since the knight on f4 will simply hinder the advancement of the f-pawn, and thus Black's attack overall, as opposed to applying any real pressure.

15. Rab1

Planning b4

15... f5 16. exf5

In such positions, White hopes that Black will unwillingly overextend his pawns, weakening the king and thus providing counterplay. In the meantime, White must try to break through on the queenside.

16... gxf5 17. b4





All the play up to this point has been reasonable, and here Vigorito must make an important decision.

17... Kh8!?

There is clearly a lot of potential tension in the position by virtue of the pawns on b4, e5 and f5 threatening to advance. While Black can certainly begin to roll his pawns right away, doing so commits him to a particular plan, which may be disadvantageous in the long run. For example: 17... f4 18. Bc1 Nd4 19. Nxd4 exd4 20. Ne2, and White has succeeded in stretching his opponent thin. More reasonable may be 17... e4!? 18. Nd4 Nxd4 19. Bxd4 20. Rxd4 Ne5 21. Qd2 Be6 22. c5 Rad8 23. Rd1 Qg7 24. Kh2, but I remain unconvinced that Black has any advantage here. Thus, it seems to me that Kh8 is more flexible and the best option here.

18. c5?!

This is likely too ambitious. I attempt to get a foothold on d6 without first consolidating my position, and thus allow Black to dictate the position for a couple of moves. 18. Ne2! looks a lot more promising in that it will probably force Black to play f4 in the long run, thus narrowing my opponent's possibilities. By firmly taking the d4 square under control, Ne2 is able to prevent both e4 and Nd4, both of which would come back to haunt me later in the game.

18... a5 19. a3

As much as I tried to make 19. b5 work over the board, I couldn't fully justify the pawn sacrifice. In hindsight, this would have perhaps given me better counterplay than the game; for example: 19. b5 Ndx c5 20. bxc6 bxc6 21. Rb6 f4 22. Bc1 Qc7 23. Na4 Nxa4 24. Rxc6 Qe7 25. Qxa4 Bd7 26. Rxd7! Qxd7 27. Qe4, and White's bishop pair will provide plenty of compensation in a position where Black's pawns are fixated and their king is exposed.

19... axb4 20. axb4 Ra3?

Vigorito eases the pressure on me a little bit with this pretty but ultimately incorrect move. He should have continued with e5, as in the game;

here, he gives me an important, but ultimately missed opportunity.

21. Rb3?

Returning the favor. The rook on a3 is unstable and as of yet does not actually threaten anything, so an improvement would be 21. Qc1! forcing 21... Ra8 (this alone shows that Ra3 was erroneous) 22. Ng5, where White achieves full counterplay once again.

21... Rxb3 22. Qxb3 e4 23. Nd4 Ne5



As sometimes happens in chess, after a series of somewhat subtle inaccuracies, it becomes clear to me that my position is beginning to fall apart. It may take the reader a few minutes to realize just how bad this position is; at a glance, Vigorito's pieces are only slightly more active than mine, with the closed-in bishop on c8 being balanced on by the pawn on e4. Unfortunately, in a position where every piece can ostensibly make a move, White is in a sort of bizarre zugzwang. f4 cannot be stopped, and any attempt to do so will only quicken White's demise.

24. Qc2?

I attempt to prevent f4 by applying pressure on e4, but this fails miserably. 24. Nxe6 didn't work either: 24... Bxe6 25. Qc2 f4 26. Bc1 e3 27. fxe3 f3! —+. The only way out was the fantastic 24. Nxf5!! Rxf5 25. Nxe4. White has sacrificed a



knight for two pawns, but has in return completely shifted the dynamics of the game. Black has gone from having to carry out a straightforward and deadly attack to navigating the complexity of a position where White is the one attacking the exposed king. While Black is still slightly better, the ensuing complications provide compensation for the lost material; for example: 25... Bd7!? 26. Ng3 Rf8 27. Nh5 Ng6 28. Nxd4 Qxd4 29. Bc1! and now White is the one playing for a win!

24... Nxd4 25. Bxd4 Nf3+!

After this simple combination, my position is essentially busted.

26. gxf3 Bxd4 27. Kh1 Qg7 28. Ne2 Bxf2

29. fxe4

For the last couple of moves, I've been quickly playing the only tricky moves. In a terrible position, complexity and the clock are your two best friends.

29... fxe4??

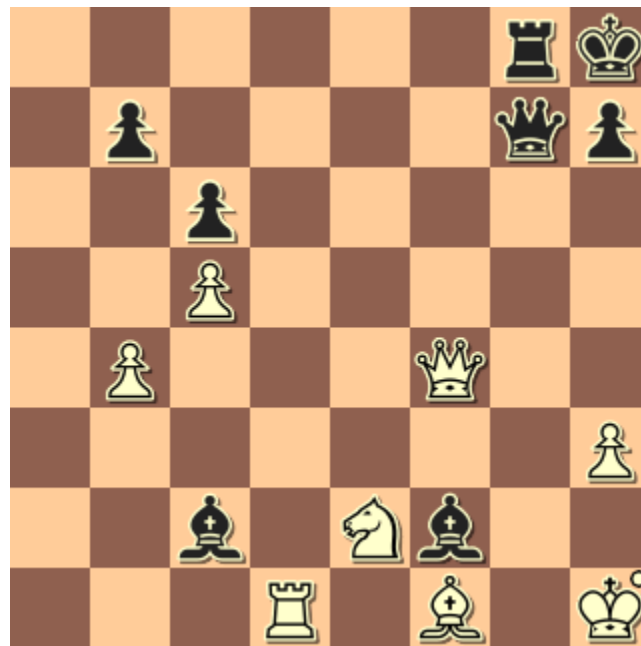
I hope the reader will excuse my somewhat liberal use of the double question mark, but I annotate this way because I believe that this move is the critical mistake of the game. While the computer suggests the slightly more complicated 29... Be6 —+, I see no hope after the simple 29... f4 30. Qc3 f3 31. Qxg7 Kxg7 32. Nd4 Kg6 33. Rd3 Bxd4 34. Rxd4 Kg5 35. Kg1 f2+ 36. Kg2 Kf4 37. Rc4 Ke3. By ignoring the e4 pawn, Vigorito had the chance to paralyze my queen while maintaining a weakness on e4; I am almost certain that this would have been sufficient for victory. 29... fxe4, on the other hand, frees my queen and gives me enough counterplay to hold the position.

29... f4 30. Qc3 f3 31. Qxg7+ Kxg7 32. Nd4 Kg6 33. Rd3 Bxd4 34. Rxd4 Kg5 35. Kg1 f2+ 36. Kg2 Kf4 37. Rc4 Ke3 38. Rc3+ Kxe4 39. Rc4+ Ke3 40. Rc3+ Kd4 41. Rc4+ Ke5 42. Rh4 Bf5

30. Qxe4 Bf5 31. Qc4 Rg8 32. Qf4!

Now with a significant time advantage, I find the correct setup for my pieces. The f4–c4 queen maneuver sets up an unexpected semi-fortress,

and also affords me the possibility of eventually trading queens on c3. With the pawn gone off e4, however, the endgame is no longer lost for me; on the contrary, Bg2 and b5 can be used to rapidly liquidate the pawns off the queenside and force the draw.



32... Bc2 33. Rc1 Rf8 34. Qc4 Bf5 35. Rd1

We repeat the position from move 31; my position is solid enough that I don't even have to trade queens.

35... Re8 36. Bg2 Qe5 37. Nf4

As Vigorito attempts to make progress, burning precious time on his clock, it becomes more and more clear that my position is slowly unwinding. The worst is now behind me.

37... Be3?!

A logical move, but nonetheless dubious. If there is any advantage to be had, it is through 37... Ra8; however, the game is double-edged now.

38. Rf1

Overly cautious, and it was probably best to play 38. Re1! to tie up Black some more.

38... Rd8 39. Qf7!

Setting up the mini-trap of 39... Bxf4 40. Rxf4 Qxf4 41. Qf6+ Kg8 42. Qxd8+, with a draw. Ironically, Vigorito should have probably bailed

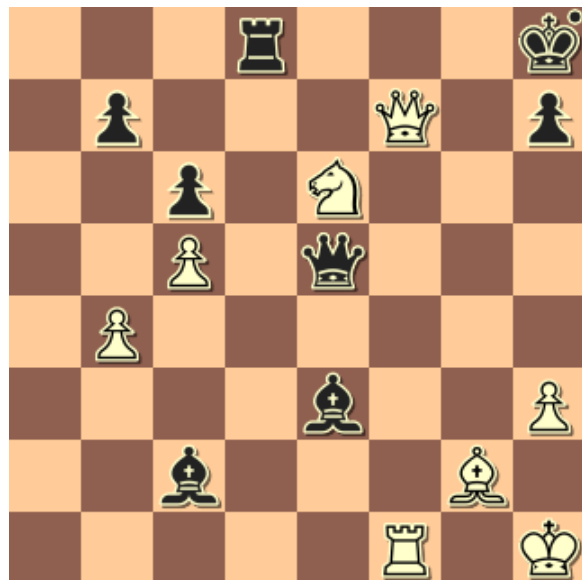


out this way anyway, since the position is now equal and complicated, a terrible combination for someone with only a few seconds to go.

39... Bc2??

The final mistake.

40. Ne6



Vigorito flagged here, but the position is lost anyway; notably, 40... Rg8 is met with 41. Qxg8+ Kxg8 42. Rf8++.

While this game was not exactly a smooth ride to the finish line, it was enough to net me a share of first place when the two co-leaders drew their game (though kudos are still in order to Nathan Solon for refusing a draw offer on move 4!)

Despite my topsy-turvy tournament, I am absolutely thrill to become the second-youngest MA State Chess Champion in history!

1-0

About the Author



Michael Isakov has been storming up the ranks of Massachusetts chess since claiming his first provisional rating, an impressive 941 from four games at the 8 & under section of the last Spiegel Cup Qualifier of the 2008-2009 season. He would go on to win that section at the Spiegel Cup Finals that year, an almost unprecedented achievement, and a harbinger of things to come.

Playing relatively few events, the young Isakov demonstrated a rapid upward trajectory, attaining the rank of master at the 2016 Eastern Class Championships with fewer than 100 tournaments logged.

Having recently finished 12th grade, the young master is one of the top scholastic players in the Commonwealth, a force to be reckoned with for even grandmasters like Aleksandr Lenderman, whom Isakov stunned in Connecticut last summer, and Ivanov (background), whom the young master had already previously bested at the 85th Mass Open in 2016.



On the Nature of Error **The Use, and Misuse, of Opening Theory**

FM Steven Winer

A very common mistake is to take a concept that is valid in a specific instance and overgeneralize when the move is appropriate. This comes up even with lines that are showed to players who are quite new. For instance players are generally shown the sequence 1.e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 quite early on in their chess careers as a good way to develop the kingside pieces to allow early castling. The problem is when a player concludes that the f1 bishop belongs on c4 in general rather than only after 1. e4 e5. In fact, against the other three most important answers to 1. e4 (1... c5 1... e6 and 1... c6) a quick Bc4 is generally not good. However the move is actually played quite often when players under 1000 face a response to 1. e4 other than e5.

An early Bc4 is good in e4 e5 lines because Black can neither play e6 nor easily establish d5. Because of this, the c4 bishop exerts useful pressure on Black's position in those particular positions. However, in general terms whether a piece is well placed is largely dependent on the pawn structure rather than some absolute principle. This is especially true for a long-range piece like a bishop. Against 1. e4 e6, 1. e4 c6 and many lines of 1. e4 c5, a bishop on c4 can be easily blocked by e6 or c6 into d5. This is especially true if the bishop is quickly committed to c4. While there are some lines of the open Sicilian (1.e4 c5 2. Nf3 into 3. d4) where the bishop can reasonably be placed on c4, it generally is only after the pawn structure has become somewhat more defined. If Bc4 is played immediately after 1. e4 c5, Black can quickly play e6 d5 and sometimes even a6 b5.

There are two general points to take away from this discussion. The first is that there is value in looking for non-committal moves that

do not give much information to the opponent. They will force the opponent to make decisions without having a clear sense of your intentions. The most useful shorthand I have found for this idea is: *necessary moves before optional moves*. The other point is to think about why you want to move the piece to a given square and whether what you want is realistic in the position. Certainly after 1. e4 c5 2. Bc4 the pressure on f7 could become relevant. The problem is that if Black is paying attention they can easily squelch the pressure on f7 by playing an early e6. Because the pressure is so easily neutralized it does not make sense to prioritize attacking f7 so early in the game.

Another, more advanced opening sequence illustrates additional points that fit into the discussion of flexibility in regard to opening theory, and that sequence is 1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 g6 3. Nc3 Bg7 4. e4 d6 5. Nf3 0-0 6. Be2 e5, the King's Indian Defence.



Here, the main line goes 7. 0-0 Nc6 8. d5 Ne7 – at this point a number of moves are possible but many of them lead to highly theoretical and sharp race positions e.g. - 9. Ne1 Nd7 10. Be3 f5 11. f3 f4 12. Bf2 g5



In this position, Black aims to directly attack the white king in a very direct and aggressive way. So far, so good, but what I have also seen a number of times is that after the alternative 7. Be3 black will play the same way: 7... Nc6?! 8. d5 Ne7 9. Nd2! Nd7 10. b4 f5 11. f3 f4?! 12. Bf2 g5



On the surface, this position appears fairly similar to the main line example, but it is not. The key is that Black is looking to attack the opposing king not necessarily the kingside. In the Be3 variation, White has not castled

kingside, and once Black commits many moves to a kingside pawn storm, can simply forgo castling altogether. In fact, I have won games in this kind of position where Black eventually opened the g file only for me to play Rg1 and simply attack Black on the very file he opened – my own king, after all, is perfectly out of harm's way.

The key takeaway from this discussion is that one must have a clear, and often very specific, idea of what a plan is. It is easy to get into a pattern of, say, a kingside pawn storm and forget to ask yourself if carrying out the pawn storm will lead to an attack. Black should be advancing on the kingside to produce an attack on the white king not simply because they want to make pawn advances for their own sake. Related to this is that complex openings played regularly by grandmasters have contingencies and alternative plans built into them. The flipside of the saying that “if you all you have is a hammer everything starts to look like a nail.” is that a savvy opponent will be quick to come up with a plan that does not lose to the proverbial hammer.

The broader point is that a major opening like the King's Indian Defense is in fact a whole complex of interconnected systems rather than some kind of monolith. Not only are there are several major variations, but within those variations there are numerous decision points and options within the overarching setup. While something like the King's Indian pawn storm is a substantial part of the opening, it is far from the only game in town. This is especially true if your opponent wants the game to be about something else. There is a range of play one must reasonably be ready for.

I am reminded of when Anand responded to questions of why he played 1... e5 against Carlsen when behind in his match instead of the ostensibly sharper 1... c5 by commenting about how “there are boring lines against the Sicilian too.” In that example, while the Sicilian may be popularly considered a sharp opening (and on average it probably is sharper) the opponent still



has to choose to enter a sharp variation, and that is hardly a compelled decision.

All this is part of the grand discussion of how to use opening theory. This is often framed in terms of ‘do not simply memorize, understand the variations.’ I think the focus of that can easily be misplaced. The variations discussed above in fact have well established answers in theory that can be looked up and used. But to understand the *why* of the opening, rather than simply the *what*, grants one a flexibility that is increasingly vital to success as they move further along in their chess development. By understanding the purpose and the ideas behind Black’s kingside pawn storm in the King’s Indian, and why it works when it does – namely, that the king on g1 without the fianchettoed bishop is ill-equipped to survive a coordinated attack by Black’s pawns and select pieces – one can learn to be aware of when these conditions change, and the plan must change as well.

The opening theory of sharp lines is incredibly deep. If a player wants to memorize variations, they need to have a realistic understanding of the volume of material necessary to consume in order to play well in a given line. If a player wants to play the black side of the Najdorf poisoned pawn variation, they should be aware that it is not just a matter of being willing to memorize a 20 move variation, but that it actually involves memorizing a number of 20 move variations that are not necessarily all that similar. It requires being able to separate the various long memorized variations in your mind to avoid playing 18 moves of variation A followed up by two bad moves that belong in variation B.

Another example I want to address relating to this is playing the white side of the open Sicilian. I have come to view the Sicilian defense as something of a misnomer. The lines of the open Sicilian are so dynamically diverse that viewing them as the same opening can be more confusing than effective. For example, the Kan, Dragon, Najdorf, and Sveshnikov

variations do not have a lot in common, and it is therefore not hard to play very well against one line and not at all well vs another line. Likewise, memorizing a lot of Dragon theory does not obviate the need to also memorize a bunch of different theory against the Najdorf. It is therefore useful for a player to get a sense of the scope of the problem before attempting to memorize large amounts of sharp Sicilian theory, lest they learn a couple of Sicilian lines well only to realize that there are still 6 other major lines of Sicilian still left, and shelving the whole attempt. Better to either learn with an understanding of what you are aiming for or simply avoid the entire line in the first place.

And yes, one can simply try to avoid memorization and go on principle, attempting to logically deduce proper moves in unfamiliar positions, but this also comes at significant cost, particularly when one faces quality opposition, and particularly when one deals with sharp lines. The King’s Indian, for example, does not offer attacks that can easily be calculated in full in the heat of a game, and knowing how to proceed in any given position demands a strong understanding of, at the very least, the themes and dynamics of that position.

Proper knowledge of opening theory is indeed valuable, but it must be approached and handled with care. For a player to decide to add an opening to their repertoire, they must first understand the scope of what they are taking on. Only then, if they so choose, may they embark on studying it comprehensively, making sure throughout to take note of the thematic elements and the *why* at the core of it all. To go halfway in any of these steps often leaves one in a worse position than if they avoided the opening altogether.



2018 U.S. Amateur Team East Personally Perfect in Parsippany

NM Matthew Fishbein

Matthew Fishbein is a National Master at Bentley University. Originally from Cape Elizabeth, Maine, he is currently that state's #1 ranked chess player, and the 2018 Maine State Champion.

At this year's U.S. Amateur Team East tournament in Parsippany, NJ, he was one of only nine players to finish a perfect 6/6 points. Also among the nine was GM Alexander Fishbein, who surprisingly bears no relation!

On February 17-19 I played in the USATE/World Team as part of the team "101 Rascals". On Board 1 was IM David Vigorito. I played on Board 2, Jason Tang joined our team on Board 3 and Mark Fins, team organizer, rounded out the team on Board 4. At an average rating of 2180, we were the 19th rated team of the 326 in the tournament this year. With 5 points, we finished 7th (on tie breaks). I finished 6-0 for the first time in six tries at this tournament. That won me the Board 2 prize, as the only Board 2 with a perfect score. Our team won rounds 1,3,4 and 5, and drew rounds 2 and 6. While I was proud of my individual performance, the sweetest games were certainly the ones where the team also won, and here are two such games:

NM Matthew Fishbein (2228)

Mark DiCostanzo (2045)

U.S. Amateur Team East (4)

02.18.2018

English, Symmetrical [A37]

1. Nf3! g6 2. c4 Bg7 3. Nc3 d6 4. g3 c5 5. Bg2 Nc6 6. 0-0 Bg4 7. a3 Nf6 8. h3 Bd7 9. Rb1 0-0 10. b4 cxb4 11. axb4 a6 12. b5 axb5 13. cxb5 Ne5 14. Nxe5 dxe5 15. Bxb7!?



Creating a way more interesting game, I want to put pressure on him with my very strong b-pawn. I could instead play the long game of pressure with 15 Kh2

15... Bxh3 16. Bg2 Bxg2 17. Kxg2 Nd5

18. Qb3 e6

18... Nxc3 19. dxc3!, and white has a major pawn advance.

19. Ne4?!

Better was 19. Nxd5 exd5 20. b6

19... Qb6 20. Ba3 Rfc8 21. Rfc1 Rxc1 22. Rxc1

Bf8 23. Bxf8 Kxf8 24. Qf3!? Kg7 25. Ng5 Ra7

26. Rc6 Qxb5 27. Rxe6! Nf4+

27... fxe6?? 28. Nxe6 Kh6 29. Qf8+ Kh5

30. g4+ Kxg4 31. Qf3+ Kh4 32. Qh3#

28. gxf4 fxe6 29. Nxe6+ Kg8

29... Kf6 30. fxe5+! Kxe6 31. Qf6+ Kd5

32. Qd6+ Kc4 (32... Ke4 33. f3+ Kf4 34. Qf6#)

33. Qd3+ Kb4 34. Qd4+

30. fxe5 Qe8 31. Qb3 Re7 32. Ng5+ Kg7

33. e6?!

Better is to keep control of the center with 33. d4

33... h6?!

Missing Qc6+, which is better.

34. Qc3+ Kg8 35. Ne4 Qb5 36. Nf6+ Kf8

37. Nd7+ Kg8 38. Qc8+ Kh7 39. Qf8 Qd5+

40. Kg1 Rxd7

40... Rxe6 41. Qf7+ Kh8 42. Nf8



41. exd7 Qxd7 42. Qf4 Kg7 43. d4 h5 44. e3 Qd5? 45. Qe5+ Qxe5 46. dxe5 g5 47. f4 g4 48. Kf2 h4 49. f5 g3+ 50. Kg2 Kf7 51. e6+

1-0

Jack Cheng (2066)

NM Matthew Fishbein (2228)

U.S. Amateur Team East (5)

02.19.2018

Benoni [A65]

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 g6 3. f3 c5 4. d5 Bg7 5. e4 d6 6. Nc3 O-O 7. Nge2 e6 8. Ng3 exd5 9. cxd5 a6 10. a4 h5!? 11. Bg5 Re8 12. Be2 Qb6 13. Qd2 Nh7 14. a5 Qc7 15. Be3 h4 16. Nf1 Nd7 17. Qc2 Rb8 18. Nd2 f5!?



A very sharp but risky move that generates significant counterplay.

19. Bf2 Qd8 20. exf5 gxf5 21. Qxf5 Ne5 white has a sizeable edge, but a very tough position to play.

22. Qc2 Qg5 23. g3?

23 Nce4 Qg6 24 0-0-0! Bf5 25 g4! hxg3 26 Bxg3 and white has a tough position with a major edge.

23... Bf5 24 Nce4 Qg6?!

Qh6 is better, due to control of the c1-h6 diagonal and avoiding threats on the g-file.

25. g4?!



gxh4 was way better.

25... Nxf3+?!

Though the game line is strong, I missed 25... Nxg4 26. fxg4 Bxe4 27. Nxe4 Qxe4 28. Qxe4 Rxe4 with an edge for black.

26. Bxf3 Bxe4 27. Bxe4 Ng5 28. Ra4?!

28. 0-0-0 Nxe4 29 Rhe1 is equal

28... Nxe4 29. Nxe4?! Bd4! 30. Kf1??

Here, my opponent touched his king in an ill-fated attempt at castling queenside. Better is the hard to find 30. Bxd4 Rxe4 31. Be3!, where Black has a large edge, but the game is not over yet (31. Kd1 fails to Rbe8!, where 32. Bc3 fails to Qxg4+)

30... Rxe4 31. Qc1 Rf8 32. Rxd4 cxd4

33. h3 Ref4 34. Rh2 Qe4 35. Qd1 Rxf2+

36. Rxf2 Qh1+ 37. Ke2 Rxf2+ 38. Kxf2 Qxd1 looms, and as such my opponent resigned.

0-1



Winning in Waltham

FM Jacob Chudnovsky

In fall of 2017, I had the honor of being invited to play in the Waltham Chess Club championship. I not only accepted but looked forward to the tournament with great anticipation. The championship would be played as a 6-player round robin, at the leisurely pace of only one game on a given day (one game per week, to be exact) and using a pleasantly slow time control of 40/90 G/30, with a 5-second delay from move one. The pace of the tournament would allow time for preparation against the opponents, while the time control would enable actual deep thought during the games. It would be like playing in Europe! And without people smoking everywhere!

While I did some minimal opening preparation against specific opponents, my main preparation for the tournament consisted of quitting a bad habit and establishing a good one. Over the previous year or so, I had developed a terrible addiction to speed chess. I would play numerous games of blitz and even bullet every day, mainly online but sometimes in person as well, e.g. at Harvard Square. Perhaps coincidentally, but probably not, my results and quality of play in every tournament in 2017, prior to this one, had been atrocious. Somehow, I had only lost 7 rating points, but my play was much worse than that. In particular, my time management and my tactical vision needed major repairs.

Thus, a couple months before the start of the championship, I quit speed chess almost entirely. I allowed myself to play 1-2 games every week, but not more than that. In addition, and taking advantage of the time that I had been wasting on speed chess and that was now freed up, I started doing regular tactics training. I used one of the various tools available online, solving multiple puzzles every day. With these

adjustments, I was able to start the tournament in good form.

My first game, against expert Todd Chase, was a bit shaky. After some inaccuracies in the opening as Black, I found myself in a worse position, from which I extricated myself tactically. The position stayed in the realm of dynamic equality and then simplified to a drawn rook endgame. However, just one move away from a game-ending simplification, my opponent made a serious error and allowed me to steal the full point.

After this initial hiccup, the rest of the games went more smoothly. To be clear, every game was hard-fought, and not a single opponent gave me an easy victory. Four of my five games went over 40 moves; two went over fifty. Not only that, but in most of my games, as in the first one, I confused opening lines and ended up worse (as black) or with no advantage (as white). Nonetheless, I was able to play well enough in the middlegame and endgame stages to pull out the wins. Again, I have to express my appreciation for the time control, which allowed enough time for proper planning and calculation. Crucially, I did not suffer from serious time pressure or blunders in any of my games – a direct result of my pre-tournament training, I believe.

In the end, I took first with a score of 5/5, completing the first clean sweep in the history of the Waltham Chess Club championship. SM Sergio German finished second with 3.5/5.

#	Name	Rtng	Rd 1	Rd 2	Rd 3	Rd 4	Rd 5	Tot	Prize
1	Jacob Chudnovsky	2429	W5	W3	W2	W6	W4	5	1st
2	Sergio Dario German	2416	D3	W6	L1	W4	W5	3.5	2nd
3	Sherif Khater	2264	D2	L1	L4	W5	W6	2.5	
4	Farzad Abdi	2326	W6	U..	W3	L2	L1	2	
5	Todd Chase	2070	L1	U..	D6	L3	L2	0.5	
6	Edward Astrachan	1932	L4	L2	D5	L1	L3	0.5	



The following game was key in determining the winner of the tournament:

FM Jacob Chudnovsky (2424)
SM Sergio Dario German (2403)
Waltham Chess Club Championship (3)
10.27.2017
Ruy Lopez, Closed [C91]

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5 a6 4. Ba4 Nf6
5. O-O Be7 6. Re1 b5 7. Bb3 d6 8. c3 O-O
9. d4 Bg4 10. Be3 exd4 11. cxd4 Na5 12. Bc2
c5

The main alternative is 12... d5 13. e5 Ne4 with a principally different pawn structure.

13. Nbd2?!



Not a terrible move, but a bit of an inaccuracy. Superior, and much more common, are 13. dxc5, after which Black can choose between the "normal" 13... dxc5 and the unexpected and promising gambit 13... Nc4!?, and 13. h3 - the point being that after 13... Bh5 14. g4 Bg6 15. Nbd2 cxd4 white can recapture 16. Nxd4.

13... cxd4! 14. Bxd4 Nc6

Now Black gets a lot of activity.

15. Be3 d5 16. h3!? Bh5

16... dxe4 17. hxg4 exf3 18. Qxf3 would give white a strong initiative

17. g4 Bg6 18. e5 Ne4

Both sides were aiming for this position starting with 16. h3.

19. a3

Possibly better was 19. Nb3 aiming for Nb3-d4.

19... f5!?

An aggressive move that at first glance seems to give Black a significant advantage. However, with best play from both sides, it should lead to approximate equality.

20. Nxe4!

20. exf6 Bxf6 and 20. gxf5 Bxf5 are clearly better for Black. I spent a while calculating the exchange sacrifice 20. Nd4 Nxe5 21. Ne6 Qd6 and decided it's fine for White. But then I saw the Black can simply play 20... Nxd4 and get a free attack against White's exposed king.

20... fxe4?!



An inaccuracy based on a missed tactic three moves down the line. It may appear that 20. Nxe4 is a blunder, and that Black is now winning by kicking away the f3 knight and collecting the e5 pawn. However, it turns out the knight is protected by indirect, tactical means. After the optimal 20... dxe4 21. Rc1!, indirectly protecting the f3 knight because of 21... exf3 22. Bb3+, exchanges would follow, most likely leading to a drawish endgame.

21. Bb3!

White does not have to move the knight!

**21... Bf7**

Forced.

22. Rc1 Rc8?

This leads to a large advantage for White. Better was 22... Na5 23. Nd4 Nc4! although 24. e6 Be8 (24... Bg6 25. Nc6) 25. Nf5 is still very unpleasant for Black, or, even better, 22... Qd7 23. e6! Qxe6 24. Rxc6 Qxc6 25. Ne5 Qd6! 26. Nxf7 Rxf7 27. Bxd5 Rd8! +/-.

23. e6!

This is what Black missed when playing 20... fxe4. It turns out White still does not have to move the attacked knight or give up the e5 pawn. In fact, Black is the one who will soon have to give up material, due to the weakness of the d5 pawn and the a2-g8 diagonal.

23... Be8

The point of White's tactic is that 23... Bxe6 is answered by 24. Rxc6! Rxc6 25. Nd4, and after, for example, 25... Qd7 (25... Rd6 26. Nxe6 Rxe6 27. Qxd5 Qxd5 28. Bxd5 transposes) 26. Nxe6 Rxe6 27. Qxd5 Qxd5 28. Bxd5, the best Black can hope for is a pawn-down endgame with a worse position. However, the move played does not hold the position for long either.

24. Nd4 Nxd4

24... Ne5 25. Rxc8 Qxc8 26. Bxd5 +/-

25. Qxd4 Bc6 26. Red1 Bf6?!

This try for counterplay is refuted by a simple but pretty tactic. However, Black had no way to hold d5 in any case.

27. Qxe4! Kh8

27... dxe4 28. e7+ Kh8 29. Rxd8 Rfxd8 30. exd8=Q+ Bxd8 31. Be6 +-

28. Bxd5 Bxd5 29. Qxd5 Qxd5 30. Rxd5 Bxb2?

This loses instantly, but of course, Black is already lost.

31.e7!

Black resigned due to 31... Bxc1 32. exf8=Q+ Rxf8 Bxc1 +-, 31... Rxc1+ Bxc1 +-, or 31... Rfe8 32. Rxc8 Rxc8 Rd8+ +-.

1-0

On his way to second place, Sergio won convincingly against Farzad Abdi, the third-highest rated player in the field.

Sergio kindly provided notes along with the game score, and I am including his analysis as well as mine.

SM Sergio Dario German (2403)

NM Farzad Abdi (2310)

Waltham Chess Club Championship (4)

11.03.2017

Ruy Lopez, Closed [C91]

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5 Nf6 4. d3

This quiet anti-Berlin line has become popular at the top level and can lead to a variety of pawn structures, depending on further choices by both sides.

4... d6 5. c3 Bd7 6. O-O g6 7. Nbd2 Bg7 8.**Ba4**

The purpose of this move is unclear. It seems White could have saved a tempo and played 8... Re1 right away. The position of the bishop could be determined later.

8... O-O 9. Re1 h6

Black's pawn structure is identical to that in the King's Indian defense. Much like in that opening, Black wants to carry out a pawn storm, starting with f7-f5. Here, it seems that Black was worried that 9... Nh5(e8) right away would run into 10. Nf1 f5 11. Bb3+ Kh8 12. Ng5. But in fact, both 9... Ne8 and 9... Nh5 are playable, e.g. 9... Ne8 10. Nf1 f5 11. Bb3+ Kh8 12. Ng5 Qf6 13. exf5 Bxf5, with a slight advantage for white but a complex and dynamic position, or 9... Nh5 10. Nf1 f5 11. Bb3+ Kh8 12. Ng5 fxe4!? (not necessary but fun; both 12... Qe7 and 12... Qf6 are fine as well) 13. Nf7+ Rxf7 14. Bxf7 exd3 15. Qxd3 Nf4, with excellent compensation for the exchange.

10. Nf1 Nh5 11. h3

SDG: Prophylaxis against ...f7-f5.

11... Qf6?!



SDG: I don't like the queen here. 11... Qe8 12. Bb3 Kh8 13. d4 f5 14. exf5 gxf5 15. dxe5 dxe5 16. Ne3 Rd8 ∞

I agree with the assessment of 11... Qf6 as an inaccuracy. Black actually did not need to make any queen move and could have played 11... f5 despite white's attempted prophylaxis: 11... f5 12. Bb3+ Kh7 13. exf5 gxf5 14. Nxe5 (14. Ng5+ hxg5 15. Qxh5+ Bh6 => Nxe5 15. Qxh5 Nxd3 =. **12. d4! Rad8?!**

SDG: 12... exd4!? 13. cxd4 Rad8

Black's 11th move made 12. d4 possible, by leaving the d7 bishop undefended. Here, I agree that 12... exd4 would have been accurate, and that 12... Rad8 is an error, albeit one that goes unpunished.

13. d5

SDG: 13. Ne3! Nf4 14. Nd5! (I missed this!) 14... Nxd5 15. exd5 Ne7 16. dxe5± winning a pawn.

To extend the variation a little, 16... dxe5 17. Nxe5 Bxa4 18. Qxa4 R(N)xd5? runs into 19. Nd7, winning an exchange. Although not best, 13. d5 still gives White an advantage due to Black's awkwardly placed pieces.

13... Nb8

Not 13... Ne7? 14. Bxd7 Rxd7 15. Ne3, and to save the queen from getting trapped by 16. Ng4, Black will have to give up material.

14. Bxd7

SDG: A critical decision. Perhaps it was better to play 14. Bc2 to prevent the knight on b8 getting back into the game. However, the light-color bishop gives Black good attacking opportunities on kingside, so the exchange seemed safe for White.

I agree with the decision made by Sergio.

Exchanging light-square bishops in this type of pawn structure leaves White with a good bishop vs. bad bishop and takes the sting out of Black's kingside initiative.

14... Nxd7 15. b4 Nf4

SDG: 15...c6!?

16. Kh2

SDG: Prophylactic move.

16... a5?! (SDG)



SDG: Black starts a dubious plan of playing on the queenside, but clearly White is better on that side. Better was to play 16... c6.

For some reason, the computer likes 16... a5, but I agree with Sergio's assessment. Black's problem is that he has tangled up his pieces in such a way that he will find it very hard to carry out the necessary pawn storm. For example, 16... Qe7 would not actually threaten 17... f5 due to the X-ray on Black's queen from the e1 rook. Indeed, 16... c6, challenging the center, seems best.

**17. a3**

SDG: 17. g3!? Nh5 18. bxa5 Ra8 19. Ne3 Qe7 (I missed that White threatened Ng4) 20. Nc4, and White wins a pawn and has pressure on b7.

In turns out 17. g3 runs into a strong tactical rejoinder: 17... axb4! Now 18. cxb4? is nearly losing after 18... Nxd5! 19. exd5 (19. Qxd5 Qxf3) e4, and 18. gxf4 exf4, followed by 19...bxc3, gives Black fantastic compensation for the piece. Sergio's choice is more solid.

17... Ra8 18. Be3 Nb6?!

Black continues playing on the wrong side of the board. The knight aims for c4, but White will protect that square, leaving the b6 knight without a purpose. Instead, Black should have started untangling with 18... axb4 19. axb4 (19. cxb4 c6 with counterplay) Rxa1 20. Qxa1 Qd8.

19. N1d2

I prefer 19. Qb3, not only covering c4 but connecting the rooks. It's possible White was concerned about 19... a4, but either 20. Qa2 or 20. Qc2 Nc4 21. N1d2, with c3-c4 coming, keeps the position under control (21... Nxe3?? 22. fxe3 traps the f4 knight).

19... Ra6

Again, 19... axb4 would have been better. Black is on his way to tangling up his pieces on the queenside as well.

20. c4

SDG: 20. g3 Nh5 21. Qe2: This was an interesting alternative to displace the black knight, but I felt that Black could have counter-attack chances by preparing ...f7-f5-f4.

I like Sergio's choice in the game. As in the King's Indian, White moves to expand and dominate on the queenside. Due to his unfortunate piece placement, Black lacks real counterplay.

20... Nd3?!

SDG: 20... axb4 21. axb4 Nd3 22. Rxa6 bxa6 23. Rf1 Nxb4 24. c5 dxc5 25. Bxc5 a5 26. Bxf8 Bxf8±

21. Rf1± (SDG)

The point is that Black cannot transpose to the analysis line above: 21... axb4 22. Qc2 +/- Still, 21... axb4 22. Qc2 Nf4 23. axb4 was, relatively speaking, Black's best choice.

21... c5??

SDG: This just loses on the spot.

22. bxa5?!

SDG: I simply forgot that I could take en passant! 22. dxc6 bxc6 23. b5, winning the knight!

Although Sergio missed the immediate win, the move played retains a large advantage.

22... Nb2?

SDG: If 22...Rxa5, 23. Qb3 wins one of the knights, but better was 22... Nc8 23. Qb3 Nf4 24. Qxb7 Rxa5 25. a4, although the position is still a technical win for White.

Black resigned.

SDG: Black resigned without waiting to my move. White was easily winning as the knight on b2 is trapped, e.g. 23. Qc2 N6a4 24. Nb3 followed by Bc1.

Sergio expertly took advantage of his opponent's misplacement of his pieces and converted the advantage cleanly and without serious errors.

1-0

In conclusion, I want to thank Nicholas Sterling for the invitation and for organizing and running the tournament. The championship ran smoothly, and players were allowed to reschedule games from the official day and time of a given round if circumstances made this necessary. This allowance was very helpful and appreciated. I greatly enjoyed the opportunity to play and look forward to playing again in 2018.

*Game Spotlight***Zierk – Ivanov,
Boston Chess Congress 2018**

GM Alexander Ivanov

IM Steven Zierk (2562)

GM Alexander Ivanov (2565)

Boston Chess Congress (4)

01.07.2018

Caro-Kann, Classical [B19]

**1. e4 c6 2. d4 d5 3. Nc3 dxe4 4. Nxe4 Bf5
5. Ng3 Bg6 6. h4 h6 7. Nf3 e6**

This move is far less common than the usual 7... Nd7, but I've already tried it several times including against my present opponent. Black allows the immediate 8. Ne5, planning to trade knights after Nd7.

8. h5

Transposing to the main lines. In several games White tried to refute Black's provocative 8th move by way of 8. Ne5 Bh7 9. Bd3 Bxd3 10. Qxd3 Nd7 and now 11. f4 (11. Bf4 Nxe5 12. Bxe5 is less aggressive) 11... Be7 12. Bd2!? sacrificing the pawn on h4 for a lead in development with unclear play

**8... Bh7 9. Bd3 Bxd3 10. Qxd3 Nf6 11. Bd2
Be7 12. 0-0-0 0-0 13. Kb1**

The most popular move in this position, there's about a hundred games with it in the online database.

13... Nbd7

After this the number of the games online increases more than tenfold (!) due to transpositions after the 'standard' 7... Nd7. During the game I remembered that we had played the same variation with Zierk before, but forgot the exact move order. As it turned out that game continued: 13... c5 14. Ne4 Nbd7 15. c4 (15. g4!?) 15... cxd4 16. Qxd4 Qc7 17. Nxf6+ Nxf6 18. Bf4 Qa5=, Zierk-Ivanov US Chess League 2013

14. Qe2

The most popular sequence here is 14. Ne4 Nxe4 15. Qxe4 Nf6 16. Qe2 Qd5 17. Ne5 (17. Be3) 17... Qe4, followed by
A) 18. Be3 Nd5 19. Rhe1 (19. Rh3) 19... c5!? 20. f3 Qxe3 1/2-1/2 (20) Ballow,J (2418)-Rawlings,A (2359) ICCF email 2010, or
B) 18. Qxe4 Nxe4 19. Be1 (19. Be3!?) with a slight plus for White in the ending

14... c5

14... Qb6!?

15. dxc5

Checking the online database shows the majority of white players like this capture, but there is an interesting alternative which happened in 19 games (!) and which I didn't even consider during play: 15. d5!? Nxd5 16. Ne4∞ planning 17. g4.

15... Qc7 16. c4?!

This restricts the knight on f6, which can't get to d5, but weakens several squares close to the white king, which can become a problem with Queens still on the board.

16. Nf5!? Bxc5 (16... exf5 17. Qxe7 Rfe8 18. Qd6±) 17. Nxh6+!? gxh6 18. Bxh6 Rfd8 19. Rh3 Bf8 20. Rg3+ Qxg3 21. fxg3 Bxh6

16... Rfd8

Now 17. Nf5 Bc5 favors Black.

17. Bc3 Nxc5 18. Ne5?

This is too optimistic. White overextends his position.

18. Be5 Rxd1+!? (18... Qc6 19. Nd4!? with the idea of 19... Qxg2?? 20. Rdg1+-) 19. Rxd1 Qc6± 20. Nd4 Qxg2±

18. Rhe1!?

18... Na4

Now Black is better.

19. Bd4

19. Qc2 Nxc3+ 20. Qxc3 Bd6!? 21. f4 Bxe5 22. fxe5 Ng4±

19... Ba3!

Nowadays, with millions of games available online for everyone to see, it's not easy to make a new move in the opening. I was happy to find this refutation of White's hasty 18. Ne5? at the board only to discover after the game that we



had a predecessor (see comments to White's next move)! Much less convincing is 19... Bc5?! 20. Bxc5 Qxc5 21. Rhe1∞, Lisowski-Urban, Opole 2006



20. Ng4

20. bxa3 Rxd4+-

20. Rd3 Rxd4 21. Rxa3 Nb6 22. Rc1 Ne4 23. Nxe4 Qxe5 24. Re3 Rad8 25. g4 Na4 26. c5 Rd2 0-1 (26), Abdulov,O (2337)-Morchiasvili,B (2322), Nakhchivan 2015

20... Nxc4 21. Qxc4 Rxd4 22. Rxd4

22. Qxd4 Bxb2 23. Qd7 Qxc4+ 24. Qxb7 Rc8 25. Qb3 Qc6 sees 26. Ne2 Bf6 27. Rc1 Qe4+ 28. Rc2 Nc3+!? 29. Nxc3 Rxc3 30. Qb2 Rc6+-

22... Bxb2 23. Rd3 Be5 24. Ne2 Rc8

24... Nc5!? 25. Rd2 Qb6+ 26. Kc1 Qb4+

25. c5

A desperate attempt to create open lines for White's heavy pieces which almost succeeded in getting him out of trouble.

25... Nxc5 26. Rc1 Qb6+ 27. Rb3 Qd8 28. Re3 Qb6+ 29. Rb3 Qd6 30. Qc4 b6

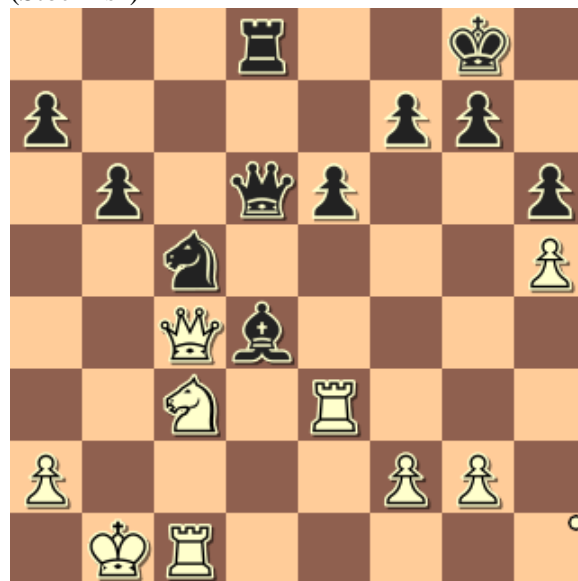
Black had 4 minutes left on his clock here.

30... Rc7 31. Re3 (31. Rb5 Na4 32. Qxc7 Qd3+ 33. Qc2 Qxb5+-) 31... Qb6+-

31. Re3 Rd8 32. Nc3 Bd4?!

There was no need to allow the following pin, but I was already in time trouble.

32... Qb8 33. Rd1 Rxd1+ 34. Nxd1 looked unclear to me: 34... Qd8! 35. Kc2 Qg5!+- (Stockfish)



33. Rd1

33. Nb5? Qf4!+-

33... a6 34. Ne2?!

34. Ne4!? Qd7!? (34... Qd5?! 35. Qxd5 Rxd5 saw 36. Nc3!? Rd7 37. Rf3=) 35. f4 is less clear. Now I find a way to regroup my pieces.

34... e5+ 35. f4 b5! 36. Qc2 Qf8!+ 37. Nxd4?!

After the game, my opponent correctly suggested 37. Rh3 as an improvement. Still, Black is better after 37... Ne6!? (37... Na4 38. fxe5 Bxe5 39. Rxd8 Qxd8) 38. fxe5 Bxe5 39. Rxd8 Qxd8

37... exd4

Now it's easier for Black to avoid blunders.

38. Re5 Na4 39. Rde1?

39. Ka1 Nc3 40. Rde1 Nd5+ (40... b4+)

39... d3+- 40. Qd2 Nb6

The time control has passed. Black is winning.

41. Re7 Nc4 42. Qd1 d2 43. R1e4 Nd6 44. Re2

Nf5 45. R7e5 Qb4+ 46. Ka1 Rd4 46... Qc3+

47. Kb1 Rd4 48. a3 Qxa3 49. R5e4 Qd3+-

47. Re8+ Kh7 48. Rc8 Nd6 49. Rc7 Rd3

0-1

87th Mass Open

Victory in Marlborough: Nate's Story

FM Nathan Solon

To win an important tournament, it's usually necessary to steal at least one game. At some point you'll find yourself in a bad, even hopeless, position and you will need to use every reserve of grit and cunning to turn it around. In chess lingo such wins are often called "lucky," but I've never really understood why. While I do believe there is luck in chess, I don't see why come-from-behind victories are any luckier than other kinds. Don't defense, counterattack, and resourcefulness require just as much skill as opening preparation and careful planning? The idea of comebacks being lucky seems to rest on an unrealistic idea of how chess games "should" go: all one way, with no mistakes. But we know that most games, even those played by the best players in the world, are filled with mistakes. As the old saying goes, "the winner is the player who makes the next to last mistake."

With that said, the game I was most proud of in this tournament was my second round win against Jason Tang. By conventional standards, it was my worst game, as I bungled the opening horribly and was losing for most of the game. But I resisted the temptation to give up, defended stubbornly, and eventually had an opportunity to turn things around.

Jason Tang (2118)**FM Nathan Solon (2355)****87th Mass Open (2)****05.26.2018****Philidor [C41]****1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 d6**

The Philidor is a very misunderstood opening. The point is not to hope for a draw, as many assume, but quite the opposite: to aim for a

tense middlegame struggle with many pieces on the board. In return, Black accepts a cramped position.

3. d4 exd4 4. Nxd4 Nf6 5. Nc3 Be7 6. Bc4 O-O 7. O-O c6 8. Re1 Re8?!

The point of Black's last move is more or less to prepare 8... b5, so it would make sense to follow through.

9. a4 a5 10. h3 Na6 11. Bf4 Nc5?

The most typical Philidor setup, but it doesn't work very well here. Better was 11... Bf8

12. Nb3 Be6?



There was definitely an element of wishful thinking at play here: if this move worked, it would justify my previous play. There's only one tiny problem: it doesn't work.

12... Nxb3 13. Bxb3 Be6 was uninspiring but perfectly playable.

13. Nxc5 Bxc4 14. Nxb7 Qb6 15. Nxd6 Bxd6 16. Bxd6 Qxb2 17. Re3!

I was counting on 17. Qd4 Nxe4 to save my bacon, but after the simple move played, I'm just down a pawn with a terrible position.

17... Qb6 18. Rb1 Qa7

This pathetic retreat seems beneath the queen's station, but there's nothing better.

19. e5 Nd5 20. Nxd5 cxd5 21. Rg3 Re6 22. c3 Rae8 23. Qd4 Qa8



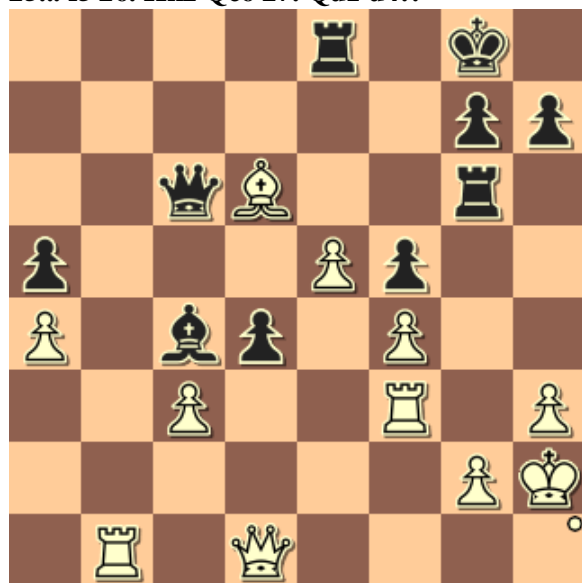
I judged the endgame after 23... Qxd4 24. cxd4 to be completely hopeless. White is up a pawn, all his pieces are better, and Black has not a shred of counterplay. Opposite colored bishops won't save you in a position like this. However, this move loses by force.

Best was 23... Qd7 24. Qg4 g6, where Black grovels on, at least for a little.

24. f4 Rg6 25. Rf3

25. Re3! would have decided the game. There, f5 26. exf6 wins, so White's pawn would march to f5 with a decisive attack.

25... f5 26. Kh2 Qc6 27. Qd1 d4!?



A ray of hope! In my experience, it's rare that my opponents are able to convert an advantage without giving me a single chance. The trick is to keep the fires of hope burning so that when your chance does arise, you're ready to take it. I was quite pleased with this move during the game, but I completely missed 27... Rxd6 28. exd6 Be2 In any case, White now faces an unpleasant psychological situation. After being clearly winning a few moves before, he now faces threats to his king in a murky position. And to make matters worse, he is running low on time.

28. cxd4 Bd5 29. Rg3

29. Rb5! Bxf3 30. Qxf3 would have put an

end to the monkey business. White is objectively winning and just as important, Black's counterplay is extinguished.

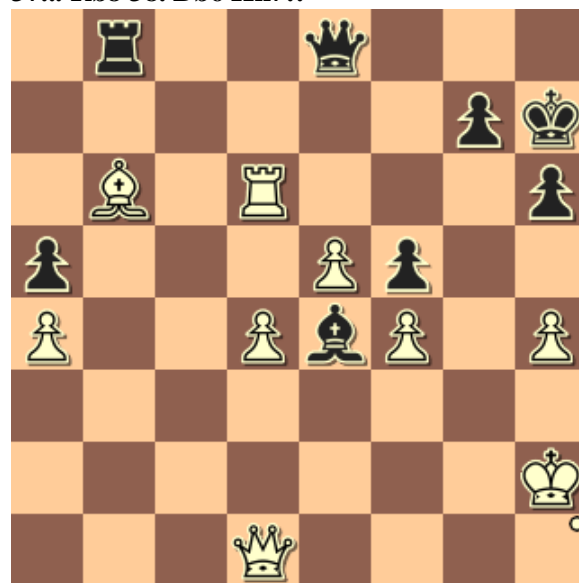
29... Rxd6 30. Kxg3 Bxg2 31. Kh2 Bf3

The position is now roughly equal and very tricky to play. White has an extra pawn, but it isn't worth much at the moment, and his center pawns are firmly blockaded. Meanwhile, his exposed king position will be a headache for the foreseeable future.

32. Qb3+ Bd5 33. Qd1 Rc8 34. Bc5 h6 35. Rb6 Qe8 36. Rd6 Be4 37. h4?

If there is one thing you should never do when you're low on time in a tricky position, it's to weaken your king's protection. The h3 pawn was like a fig leaf covering up the White king. It wasn't much, but it was doing an important job.

37... Rb8 38. Bb6 Kh7!!



My one moment of glory in this game. I was able to figure out that 38... Rxb6 39. Rxb6 Qd8 40. Qb3+ Bd5 41. Rb8 would turn the tables on me and come up with this sneaky preparatory move, all in a few seconds without giving off suspicious vibes. Although it turns out this level of cunning wasn't necessary: White has no good defense anyway.

39. d5 Rxb6 ! 40. Rxb6 Qd8

Suddenly it's over. There's no good defense to the threats of Qxb6 and Qxh4.



41. Qb3 41. Rb3 Qxh4+ 42. Rh3 Qf2# 41...
Qxh4+ 42. Kg1 Qe1+ 43. Kh2 Qh1+ 44. Kg3
Qg2+ 45. Kh4 Qg4#

0-1

After that I won a few less eventful games and drew with David Vigorito. Going into the last round, I was tied for first with Mika Brattain on 4.5/5. The tournament situation made a draw a logical result, and although we played for awhile, the balance was never seriously disturbed. That left Michael Isakov, who started the round with 4 points, the only player in striking range.

Michael was playing IM Vigorito and looked to be in rough shape when my game finished. He was staring down the bishop pair with an open king. Still, no clear win was apparent, and as I wandered back into the playing hall every so often, Michael kept hanging around. Meanwhile David was using lots of time looking for a win. His position was still more than fine, but somehow you could almost feel what was about to happen. On move 39, with seconds on the clock, David blundered into mate. There was nothing to do but simply let his time run out.

This capped a remarkable last day for Michael, who closed the tournament with wins against GM Ivanov and IM Vigorito. Although he was trailing in both games, he refused to give up and ultimately his opponents could not break his resistance. In my book that makes him a very deserving co-champion in a tournament that was friendly to comebacks and underdogs.

In your next tournament, I encourage you to fight until the end in every game. You may be surprised by the results. Or I suppose if you get as good as Mika you can just crush everyone.

About the Author



FM Nathan Solon is a relative newcomer to the Massachusetts chess scene, but has certainly made his impression felt.

Solon, a native of Michigan, rose quickly through scholastic ranks in the mid-to-late 1990's, even making an appearance in the U.S. Cadet Championship in 2001, the year after he earned his National Master title and turned 15.

Then, after his scholastic career culminated in a 2002 Denker tournament of champions appearance representing his home state, Solon would proceed to play a total of six rated events in the next fifteen years.

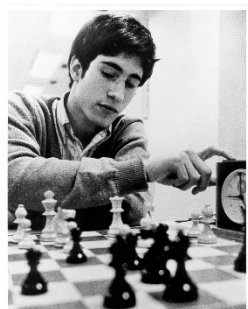
Then, in 2017, the master reemerged. Now living in Jamaica Plain, he has already won or shared first at the 2018 Mass G/60, the MIT Spring Open, and the 87th Mass Open – and those were all within a two-month range!

A programmer and an avid poker player, the once-Michigander is currently on a rapid march towards 2400. Having already bested some of the Commonwealth's finest, he now sits comfortably as a member of the Massachusetts chess elite.



Ken Rogoff: The Forgotten Grandmaster

Nathan Smolensky



Kenneth Saul Rogoff didn't play chess in earnest until he received a set from his father for his thirteenth birthday. By the age of 14, he was a national master and New York Open Champion. The

Rochester prodigy would soon become a senior master, and by the age of 16, after winning the 1969 U.S. Junior Championship, he decided to drop out of school and focus on chess. He travelled across Europe and played in tournaments against the likes of Ljubomir Ljubojevic, Jan Timman, and Ulf Andersson.

And then, at the age of 18, the young man decided he wanted to become an economist.

He wouldn't quit chess right away – far from it. Rogoff would continue to play at the highest levels of American chess as he pursued his studies, earning his IM title in 1974 while pursuing a Bachelor's and Master's from Yale University, which he completed the year after.



Masters at the Boylston Club, c. 1975. From left to right: NM Marc Lonoff (seated), then-IM Ken Rogoff, NM Larry Tapper, FM Chris Chase (seated, and currently reigning New England champion!), NM and future poker pro Dan Harrington, IM Norman Weinstein

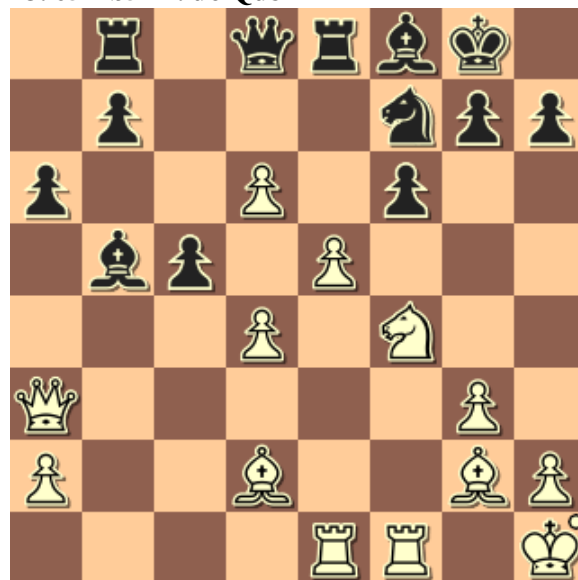
From there, Rogoff went on to MIT to spend the next five years earning his doctorate in Economics. Here, Rogoff finally earned his Grandmaster title (in 1978), and he even managed to stop the Boylston Club a few times!

It was also in these years that Rogoff played some of his finest games, including the following gem at Lone Pine 1976 (his opponent, it should be noted, is not the Blumenfeld for whom the gambit is named):

Ken Rogoff
Rudy Blumenfeld
Lone Pine (1)
03.07.1976

English, King's English Variation [A20]

1. c4 e5 2. g3 Nf6 3. Bg2 Nc6 4. Nc3 Bb4
5. Nd5 Bc5 6. e3 O-O 7. Ne2 Re8 8. O-O Bf8
9. d3 Nxd5 10. cxd5 Ne7 11. f4 exf4 12. Nxf4
Nf5 13. Qf3 Qe7 14. Kh1 d6 15. Bd2 Bd7
16. e4 Nh6 17. Rae1 f6 18. d4 Nf7 19. Qb3
Rab8 20. Qa3 a6 21. b4 c5 22. bxc5 dxc5
23. e5 Bb5 24. d6 Qd8



25. Bd5 Bxf1 26. Rxf1 fxe5 27. Bxf7+ Kh8
28. Ng6+ hxg6 29. g4 Qh4 30. Rf3 g5 31. Rh3
g6 32. Rxh4+ gxh4 33. Bxe8 Rxe8 34. dxe5

1 - 0



Solutions (Problems on p. 5)

1. **1. Qd4+! Qxd4 2. Nxc6#**
(1... c5 2. Nc6#)
From Mecking - Rocha, 1969
2. **1. Qxf8+! Kxf8 2. Bh6+ Kg8**
3. Re8#
3. **1... Qg2+! 2. Rxc2 Nh3#**
From NN - Blackburne, 1871
4. **1. Rd8! Rxd8 2. Qb5#**
(1... Qxd8 2. Qb7#)
5. **1. Rc6?!**
Sometimes, you just want to play
with your food a little longer.
6. **1. Qf6! gxf6 2. Rg3+ Kh8 3. Bxf6#**
7. **1. Qh8+! Kxh8 2. Kf7! Rf8+**
3. Kxf8 e1 (Q) 4. Bf6#
Composition by Alexandre
Deschappelles (1780 – 1847)
8. **1. Be6! fxe6 2. Qd7+ Kb8**
3. Qxe8+ Nc8 4. Nd7#
(1... Bxe6 2. Qxh5)
From Chigorin - Davydow, 1874
9. **1. Rd3+!! Kxd3 2. Kf3**
(2... g1 (N) 3. Kg2)
(And no, two same-color bishops and
a king is not mating material)
Composition by Alexey Troitzky
(1866 – 1942)

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Places to Play

This is a partial overview of active clubs in and around Massachusetts. Most time controls listed feature five second delay. Registration may end as early as 15 minutes prior to event start. For full details and club calendars, please visit club site or www.masschess.org. To add a listing for your club in future issues, please contact info@masschess.org.

MetroWest Chess Club – Natick Community Center, 117 E. Central St.

(Rt. 135) Natick, MA

Regular Events Tuesdays, 6:00 P.M. – 10:00 P.M., G/60 (1 rd / wk)

www.MetroWestChess.org

(781) 790 - 1033

Boylston Chess Club – 40 Norris St., Cambridge, MA, Suite B101

Regular Events:

Thursdays, 7:00 P.M. – 10:30 P.M., 40/90 SD/20 (1 rd / wk)

Saturdays, 10:00 A.M. – 7:00 P.M., G/60

www.BoylstonChess.orgboylstonchess@gmail.com**Waltham Chess Club** – 404 Wyman St., Waltham, MA

Regular Events Fridays, 7:00 P.M. – 12:00 A.M., Various Controls:

G/5, G/10, G/20, G/30

www.WalthamChessClub.org

(781) 790 - 1033

Wachusett Chess Club – C159, McKay Campus School,

Fitchburg State Univ., Fitchburg, MA

Regular Events Wednesdays, 7:00 P.M. – 11:00 P.M., G/100 (1 rd / wk)

www.WachusettChess.org

(978) 345 - 5011

Southeast Mass Chess Club – 16 E. Bacon St., Plainville, MA

Regular Events Wednesdays, 7:30 P.M. – 11:30 P.M., 40/90, SD/20 (1 rd / wk)

www.southeastmasschess.org

(508) 339 - 6850

Billerica Chess Club – 25 Concord Rd., Billerica, MA

Regular Events Fridays, 7:30 P.M. – 11:00 P.M., G/90 (1 rd / wk)

For further information, contact arthur978@comcast.net**Chess Master Connections** – 201 Wayland Sq., Providence, RI

Regular Events Sundays, 10:00 A.M. – 3:30 P.M., G/30

www.ChessMasterConnections.org

(401) 497 - 8366

Andover Chess Club – 360 South Main St., Andover, MA

Casual Events Fridays, 7:00 P.M.

For further information, contact andoverchessclub@gmail.com

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